# WE-FOUR AND TWO-MORE

IMOGEN CLARK

Class PZ7

Book C547GW

Copyright No.

COPYRIGHT DEPOSIT.

SHE UNFOLDED THE PAPER AND BEGAN TO READ

# WE FOUR AND TWO MORE

by IMOGEN CLARK

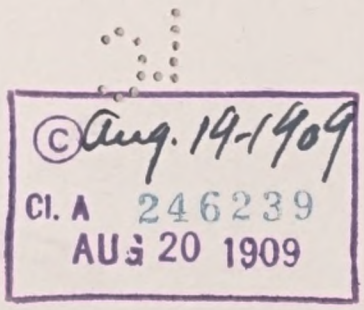
Author of "WILL SHAKESPEARE'S LITTLE LAD"

NEW YORK
T Y CROWELL & CO.
PUBLISHERS

PZ7
.C5476W

Copyright, 1909,
By THOMAS Y. CROWELL & CO.

*All Rights Reserved*



To
Four
and
One More.

# CONTENTS


| CHAPTER | | PAGE |
|---|---|---|
| I. | The Cause of Liberty | 1 |
| II. | Honor is the Subject of My Story | 21 |
| III. | Judy's Plan | 43 |
| IV. | The Arrival of the Reformers | 59 |
| V. | The Poet of the Breakfast-Table | 73 |
| VI. | The S. P. O. D. | 93 |
| VII. | The Meaning of a Prank | 110 |
| VIII. | For Love's Sake | 128 |
| IX. | The S. P. O. D. in Working Trim | 152 |
| X. | "Buttered Soles" | 167 |
| XI. | The Last Straw | 188 |
| XII. | An Afternoon Call | 205 |
| XIII. | With the Improvers | 229 |
| XIV. | "Handkerchief Day" | 256 |

# ILLUSTRATIONS

She unfolded the paper and began to read . . . . . *Frontispiece*

FACING PAGE

"Another!" she cried . . . . . 68

He jumped up waving something in his hand . 124

Then the sport began, and I tell you what, it was glorious! . . . . . 178

# We Four and Two More

## CHAPTER I

### THE CAUSE OF LIBERTY

THERE were four dogs at Uplands—Larry, the setter; Crumb, the Irish terrier; Shadow, the fox, and the brown puppy, who was the littlest of the lot and "nothing but a pure mongrel," as Danby said, with his nose in the air. The first three were Granny's property, the last one belonged to us—he was our very own. He came from nowhere in particular just after our arrival, and his welcome wasn't as pleasant as ours had been. The stable-men drove him off with sticks and stones; they didn't intend he should stay where he wasn't wanted. They made that quite clear to him, or at least they thought they did. They were wrong. Perhaps he was too young to understand, or perhaps he meant to win them over. For back he trotted in the most forgiving and forgetting spirit possible.

Now this was fine and no mistake, only the

men didn't see it in the same light. They didn't want to be won over. Instead, they agreed darkly among themselves to drown him. So they coaxed him to them, pretending they were friendly; they fed him, stroked him, made his heart go pitapat with joy, and as soon as he was wriggling all over with gladness they tied a rope around his neck and dragged him to the pond. I guess the world looked pretty black to the poor fellow then; something must have told him that his end was drawing nigh. But just as the dreadful deed was about to be enacted, as they say in the history books, the captive broke from his cruel foes and ran off as fast as he could chase.

We knew nothing of this at the time, or the men would have had us to deal with, I can tell you. We are the Egertons—Philip (that's me), Judy, my twin, Gilbert, and Margery—"us four, and no more." Cousin Laura says that that last is a matter for much rejoicing. She is Granny's cousin, so you see she isn't a really near relation to us, except that she lives at Uplands—which make a nearness very often most uncomfortable now that we've come here to stay, because Father and Mother

have gone to Manila with the regiment. We heard about the pup one afternoon when we were in the harness room and we cleared out right away. We wouldn't have anything to do with such entertainers, though they were doing their politest for us. We couldn't forget the poor little homeless one, and we searched for him high and low. But it was all in vain. And yet, a few days later, when we were out on an exploring expedition—for the place was new to us—the instant we heard a faint crying in some bushes our thoughts flew to him.

And it did seem most too good to be true, for it really was the pup himself. We recognized him from the description those unfeeling men had given, though he was thinner than ever, with his ribs showing through like barrel hoops, and the all of him so miserable that even a heart of stone would have melted at the sight. Our hearts were not of that enduring stuff, but far otherwise, as the pup must have seen at a glance. He wagged his tail weakly and crawled toward us, uttering little squeaks which set Judy and Margery to crying real tears. He was pretty far gone, but we gave

him some milk and biscuits we'd brought along and presently he seemed to feel better in his legs, you could almost see the friskiness come back. He was so glad to belong to somebody. Of course he felt that we'd adopted him, and we couldn't disappoint him after what he'd gone through—blows, and starvation, and the next thing to drowning. We just took him into our hearts and pledged ourselves solemnly to be as fathers and mothers to him. It was a happy arrangement, and everything went well until Gilbert, who is a prudential boy, cast a shiver over us all by saying that perhaps Granny would have some remarks to make, and then—what?

That was a staggerer! We'd only lately come to Uplands, and though Granny is Mother's mother, you can't always reckon on grown-ups; you have to feel your way. So we raked our brains to find out what was best to do. And first we thought we'd hide the pup in the bushes and visit him on the sly, bearing food and water to him as folks do in war-time to secreted ones. He would have to be tied of course, not to keep him from running away, but to keep him from running after

us, for though we might desert him, he'd never give us up. We soon saw that plan wouldn't work. It would be dreadfully hard upon him nights, and it might pour a deluge any time, or strange boys might tease him—or—worse! The rope, too, would frighten him, he wouldn't understand it. He'd put his whole trust in us, and the loneliness far from the people he loved—because all in a minute a dog will give you his heart for keeps—would be terrible hard to stand up under. We knew how that was ourselves. Father and Mother had only been gone a few weeks, and the ache they'd left behind was all edges—it wouldn't get comfortable. So you can see why we didn't want to plant one like unto it in a dog's breast. But the more we talked the more muddled we got, until Judy fired a question at our heads.

"Have we adopted this pup to love, and cherish, and honor, and obey—for better, or worse?" she asked.

"You bet we have," I answered, "and what's more we've sworn it ungetoutably."

"Well, then," she cried, "let's go break the news to Granny. She'll have to know sooner or later."

It was splendid advice, but just at first it knocked the wind completely out of us, and we could only stare at her while she looked back without winking; her eyes very big and shiny and her face flame color. All of a sudden she sprang to her feet. "Are you going to forget that you are a soldier's children?" she demanded.

I was up in a jiffy.

"Not me," I cried, "I'll let you know I'm no coward."

The others stood up, breathing like steam engines. "You needn't give yourself such airs, Judy Egerton," Gilbert put in angrily. "I was the first to think of Granny, and I told you so. I dare anyone to call me a 'fraid cat."

It was no time for war between us, but Judy's words—and more especially the way she said them (that's always the worst part!), were like a bomb thrown into our peaceful midst. I didn't mean, though, that there should be any fighting if I could help it.

"Oh! come, Gilbert," I interposed, "Judy only wanted to spur us on. You'll spoil everything if you start a row. We've got to stand

or fall together, and you can bet your hat there won't be any falling."

"But if it's to be all standing we'll never reach Granny," Judy wailed. "Can't you see that we've got to be up and doing with a heart for any fate?"

I kept my temper, because I knew she was right. We couldn't wait, we just had to go and have the matter settled at once. So off we trooped. I led, with the pup half asleep in my arms; then came Judy, then Gilbert, and last of all, Margery, bringing up the rear, because she was the youngest. We went very solemnly up the long drive, and when the house was reached we crept in through a side door and tiptoed along to the Blue Room. We met no one by the way. It was exactly like the Palace of the Sleeping Beauty in the fairy tale; everywhere it was so very still. And as we went we couldn't help feeling rather downhearted about our knees, with not knowing how Granny would take it all. It was hardest on me, really, because the pup would put out his little pink tongue every now and then and lick my cheek, and he did look so contented, just as if he thought

his happiness was going to last forevermore.

Granny was at her desk, but as we entered the room she turned with a smile as if she was awfully glad to see us. Perhaps she'd finished writing, or perhaps she remembered right then that Father and Mother were far away and she had to be both of them at once to us (only she never could be for all her trying!). Before she could speak I up and told her what we'd come about, and after I was through we went closer and showed her the pup.

He was as cute as they're made; he half winked at her, for all the world like some jolly little beggar, but he wouldn't budge from my arms—he just snuggled down more firmly as though to show he was there to stay.

"Why, Phil," she exclaimed, "he's nothing but a common little cur. Look at his coat——"

"Oh! Granny dear," Judy broke in, "Father says we mustn't ever judge anyone by his coat, and I'm sure when the puppy is washed and brushed he'll look more associable right away. He *is* dirty and smelly now, though inside he has the loveliest, cleanest

heart, and it will break to flinders if we desert him."

Granny didn't speak; she sat quite still looking at us, and most especially at the pup, as if she were studying something very hard.

"My dear children," she said at last, "I don't want to refuse you anything in reason, but I can't say yes to this request. I'll have Danby find a home somewhere for the little stray—a good home—won't that do as well?"

I couldn't utter a sound; I just squeezed the puppy tighter. It's queer how undetachable some things are in a moment. Gilbert and Margery stared straight before them, breathing very hard, but Judy stepped out of the line and went close to the desk.

"It wouldn't be the same to the puppy," she declared softly, "he'd be most unhappy, thinking of us. Please let him stay, dear Granny."

"There are already a number of dogs at Uplands," Granny said, a bit sharply. "Don't you like them?"

"We love them, and they adore us," Judy cried, "they're the dearest dears. Only, you see, we saved this one, and we took a vow to

look after him for better, or worse, forever and ever, so we can't break our solemn word."

"But, my dear Judy," Granny put in, "you had no right to make such a vow, you ought to have consulted me first."

"I s'pose so," Judy owned sadly, "only somehow you do a thing quick and never think about the 'ought' until afterwards. That's the way it always is! And we didn't have the time, really; we had to adopt the puppy before he could feel we were horrid like the rest of the world, and he wasn't wanted anywhere. We couldn't hurt his feelings."

Granny tapped her foot on the floor, her face all puckered up, as if thinking didn't come easy to her. Anyone could see, though, that she was trying to look at our side.

"A little common cur," she went on slowly, "and our dogs have always been thoroughbreds—that's Uplands' record. Larry, and Crumb, and Shadow are such fine fellows, I'm proud of their pedigrees."

"What is a pedigrees?" Margery interrupted. "Is it something to do with their feet?"

(That's just like her! She's always bother-

ing people with silly questions. I tried to frown her into silence, but it was too late.)

"No, darling," Granny laughed. "It's an account of one's ancestors. Let me see if I can make it clear to you. When we speak of a dog's pedigree we mean that we know something about the dogs from whom he is descended—his father and mother, and grandfathers and grandmothers, and a little chart is made in order that if the dog is exhibited at a Show the facts of his parentage may be known. Some day you'll learn all about your own pedigree, Margery, and what brave and good men and women your ancestors were. I'll show you our family tree——"

"Have we a family tree?" Margery asked, staring with all her might.

Granny sat up very straight in her chair, quite away from its back, her eyes snapping.

"My dear child," she cried, "where have you been brought up? Of course we have, and you can't find a better one in the whole country."

"Then if that's so," Judy burst in excitedly, "we ought to adopt a little dog who hasn't any tree of his own, but only bushes where he

can lay his lonely head. We ought to shelter him, and gladly too, under our family tree. There must be plenty of room."

Granny got up quickly and walked to the window, unregardful of us all. I was sure she was angry and had gone there to rule her spirit and be better than he that taketh a city, her face looked so red as she passed me. For anyone could see by the way she spoke that she was no end proud of the tree. Just like the chap in the poem who told the woodman to spare his, and touch not a single bough, because it had sheltered him in his boyhood days, and he meant to protect it, or know the reason why. I suppose Granny thought she must do that too, since Grandfather was dead and she had to run the whole place. She had to take a firm stand about intruders.

I felt, and so did Gilbert and Margery, that Judy had made a mess of it, but she didn't seem a bit sorry. Presently, however, because we put a lot of "Now you've done it, Smarty," into our looks, she grew fidgety and snapped her eyes back, blustering it out, though it wouldn't go down. She'd sent Granny into a towering rage, and the puppy was the same as

dead. He grew cuter, too, every moment—and there were a good many moments just then. Time goes so slow when you're stretched helpless on the rack of waiting.

Finally Granny turned and went right to where Judy stood, apart from us all, and she put her hand under her chin, tilting up her face. Judy isn't like Margery—you'd never think the two were sisters. Her hair is brown, not golden, and it doesn't curl a bit, though it crinkles a little back from her forehead and is long behind where it's braided in a big pig-tail. She hasn't pink and white skin, either; she's kinder pale in her unexcited moments, pale and thinnish, with never a dimple to her name, and her eyes, instead of being blue, are brown, but you never tire of looking at them—they're so full of changes, though they ain't strong, and she has to wear spectacles pretty generally. No, she isn't a mite like Margery; folks don't turn to stare after her, they just call her "odd," yet they always end up by liking her. And what's the best thing about her is that she's game through and through. So she looked back squarely at Granny; she wasn't afraid.

"Child," Granny said, with lots of love in her voice (you see she'd fought, and conquered), "it's true that those of us who have much should do our utmost for those who have little; the rich must give to the poor, the strong must help the weak. Darling, the puppy may stay."

"O-oh!" Judy cried, with a long drawn breath, while we others were dumb with surprise, "you're too swe-eet for anything! You're the very dearest granny in the whole wide world of America, Europe, Asia, Africa and the archipelagoes. See how happy the puppy looks down to the very tip of his grateful tail."

She gave Granny's hand a little squeeze, and a kiss, and the next instant we others swarmed around shouting our thanks at the top of our lungs. Granny kissed us and fought off the puppy, because he'd caught the trick of thanking, too, and his kisses were slobbery. But he didn't mind; he'd heard her kindness, and he understood.

"Don't let him come near me again, Phil," she cried. "Take him away and have him washed, and for pity's sake use some of the

waters of Arabia before you bring him where I am."

"We'll call him Janet after you," Margery began.

"No, no," Granny interrupted, "that's too great an honor, and I decline it; you'll have to decide on something else."

"What do you think of Moses?" Gilbert demanded in his lordliest manner. "It isn't a very pretty name, but we found this fellow in the bushes, too——"

"Come off your perch," I broke in. "The Moses you mean was in the bulrushes—in a quaggy place, which Lady Tress lane isn't. I've thought of a splendid name. Please listen, Granny. I told you how the stable-men tried to kill the puppy with hurling stones at him, though they didn't succeed. Then they set about to drown the little chap, but he escaped a watery grave. And so I think Liberty would be the dandiest name for him, because, you see, he'd rather have Liberty than death."

Granny stood looking at me as if she thought I'd gone crazy.

"Oh! you must know about Patrick Henry," I went on, moving nearer to her, "and how he

said: 'Gentlemen may cry, Peace, Peace, but there is no peace. The next gale that sweeps from the north will bring to our ears the clash of resounding arms. Our brethren are already in the field! Why stand we here idle? What is it that gentlemen wish? What would they have? Is life so dear, or peace so sweet, as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it, Almighty God! I know not what course others may take, but as for me, give me liberty, or give me death.'"

"Hurrah! Hurrah!" shouted Gilbert and the girls. Then Judy caught Granny's dress in her hand.

"That's Father's very, very favoritest," she cried. "You ought to hear him say it, his eyes shining just like Phil's, and his face all lighted up as if something in his insides was on fire, and he——"

She stopped very suddenly, and we had to keep still too, on account of the lumps in our throats. Even the puppy was quiet, and—somehow—Granny seemed far away; we couldn't see her clearly. But she really was quite close, for presently she patted my shoulder gently.

"Those are grand words, Phil," she said; "you can't go wrong if you remember them, and especially if you remember your dear, noble father——"

"And Mother too," Judy put in.

"And Mother too," Granny repeated. Then she clapped her hands briskly and went on in a jolly, every-dayish voice, "Cheer up, children. Two years will go very quickly, and we are all going to be so bright and brave. Look at Liberty now, struggling for freedom. I fancy he considers Phil's grasp quite as bad as chains and slavery. There! that's better. Now scamper away all of you to the stables, and tell William to give your playfellow a good scrubbing. Tell him, too, that I wish this little newcomer to be treated as well as the other dogs; that he is one of my household. Be very polite about it, and let the other men understand as well."

We cleared out directly, and in a little time Liberty was like another being. Truthfully, I think he didn't approve of the washing, though he endured it nobly, only giving a few grunts and a snap or two, which did but prove that he had some spirit. His teeth were too

young to work any mischief and William just laughed at his impudence. William's a nice fellow, with no airs or affectations about him. When I gave the men Granny's orders they listened for all they were worth, and then they owned up that they'd been wrong, and they honestly regretted it. They agreed, too, that the pup was a promising sort, which they'd overlooked before, on account of his not being as unspotted as could have been wished. Of course that was pretty handsome, and we shook hands all around to show we forgave them from our hearts. They were uncommonly nice and so eager to do things for us that they fairly tumbled over one another in their hurry, but when I told them the Patrick Henry bit they were as quiet as mice. They didn't stir, and when I got through they didn't stir, either; not that I minded, as I'd been there myself.

By and by Danby, who was sitting on the block, cleared his throat and asked me to tell it all over again, which I did. I liked doing it. The next moment the men caught on like a house on fire, their faces just shone, and before I could reach the end Danby was on his

feet calling to them to give three cheers for Liberty. Then every man was up, and the air was so full of noise that we kids had to join in, too. It was like a bugle feeling in your spine, with drums, and fifes, and waving flags all jumbled together—a fellow had to yell—he couldn't help it. There was a fine rumpus, you can bet, and it was so ear-cracking that our new Liberty scampered into Judy's arms as scared as if a whole battalion of the enemy was at his heels. He thought, somehow, that we meant him. Of course everybody roared at his conceit, but more quietly, and he soon got over his fright, though he wouldn't leave his shelter.

He was looking very different, for a bath will work wonders. We hadn't been able to use the Arabian water Granny spoke of; we just had to make plain pump water do, but it ran off the dirt splendidly, and Liberty came out spandy fresh, only smelling rather much of brown soap, which is a clean smell—though there are some who don't care for it. William said he understood, and the next we knew he'd fetched a bottle of perfumery from his room. It was libelled "The Breath of the Meadows,"

and was very far-reaching. He was awfully choice of it himself, only using it Sundays when he went to walk with Bella, the kitchen-maid, who is his best girl. But his is a rare and generous soul. In spite of everything we could say he sprinkled more than half of it over the puppy, and after that you never would have dreamed brown soap had been used at all.

## CHAPTER II

### HONOR IS THE SUBJECT OF MY STORY.

"Two more!" cried a shrill voice in the room behind me. It was Cousin Laura speaking. I knew that right off, and I tell you what, I forgot all about my book, though I'd been deep in it the moment before, as I crouched closer into the corner, scarcely daring to breathe. Yet I was pretty safe. The heavy window-curtains fell to the floor in stiff, straight folds, leaving an open space in the middle and that part of the seat for anyone to see, but there were bully hiding-places at the sides if you remembered to squnch back, and nobody would ever suspect you were there, especially if you'd piled up the cushions kinder careless-like beforehand.

"Two more!" the voice went on. "Janet Ronalds, have you gone out of your senses?"

Granny gave a little cough that meant many things.

"Not that I'm aware," she answered

coldly. "I think I may safely say I am still in my right mind, no matter what opinion others may hold of me."

"But to turn your house into an Infant Asylum," Cousin Laura squeaked, "to have six children invade it—it's preposterous, it's——"

I lost the rest of the sentence, so upsetting were those simple words "six children." What did she mean? What could she mean? There were only four of us. I sat up very straight, every part of my body tingling queerly.

Now I know, as well as the next fellow, that it isn't the thing to listen to people on the sly, only it's different if you don't set out purposely to do it. It's like the greatness that Duke—Granny's butler—is always talking about. He says some are born to it, and some scrabble around and get it themselves, and some have it thumped right down upon them. Eavesdropping is the same. Some are born eavesdroppers, and some go about eavesdroppering, and some have eavesdropping forced upon them. I really was the last first, which sounds like a charade, only it isn't.

That morning when I'd crept into the room

about ten o'clock there wasn't a soul in sight. It was raining pitchforks, though that didn't matter much to me as there was nothing special to take me outdoors. Besides, I'd seen a jim-dandy book on one of the shelves in the library, and I wanted to have a fling at it; so as soon as I could, I left the others in our quarters, the girls sewing for their stupid dolls, and Gilbert pottering around among his things. They didn't notice when I sneaked off, and I knew Judy wouldn't give me away, she'd be the only one of the lot to think of my hiding-place because she's so tremendously keen about reading herself. Gilbert and Margery only care for the books that are written for kids, while she and I like the other kind. And that's how I didn't start out meaning to do any wrong, as you can see. Granny and Cousin Laura always sat in the Blue room after their breakfast, so I never dreamed they would come into the library. Which does but prove that "dreams go by contraries," as Cook truthfully remarks. Anyway, there I was in a pretty fix. For how could I burst out and frighten them out of their seven senses? All in a flash I had to hit on what to do—to eaves-

drop, or not to eavesdrop. And the first seemed best. Besides, things had gone so far—oh! you know how it is yourself—I just had to find out who those children were.

"An Infant Asylum," Cousin Laura went on, "I really wonder you're not more firm. Why didn't you wire Peter that it was impossible?"

"Because it isn't," Granny cried hotly. "I fancy my house is large enough to accommodate all my grandchildren. If there were sixty, instead of six, I should welcome them just the same."

Cousin Laura gave a great gasp that you could hear all over the room; it sounded as if something had gone to pieces inside of her. But she was mute, only her muteness said an awful lot.

Granny chuckled a little (how I loved her for it!). She isn't a bad sort by herself; it's only because she hasn't been with children for so long that she's slow, sometimes, about understanding them.

"Come, come, Laura," she said, "bear up! There are only six after all. You can console yourself with that thought, and Jack and

Sheila are quiet little bodies. . . . Pray, don't sniff like that—it's most annoying."

I buried my guilty nose in the pillow while Cousin Laura indignantly denied any sniffing on her part.

"I'm not deaf yet," Granny said with a touch of temper that meant she'd think what she pleased. "I still retain my other faculties, though my mental powers have been questioned. And I repeat they *are* quiet, well-behaved children. Surely, you remember the charming little letters I have had from them."

Cousin Laura muttered something about the hand of the governess showing its cloven foot between the lines; you never could be certain of unassisted effort. Now, that was an unfair thing to say, and if she believed it in her secret soul she ought to have kept it there; but I suppose she was mad at being accused of a deed she hadn't done, so she spoke rashly and unthinkingly. Her words acted like a match to powder. In an instant Granny's grandmotherly spirit was up in arms, and from the way she went on you'd have thought there never had been, and never would be again, such wonderful children as Jack and Sheila

Ronalds. I didn't like the picture she drew of them. It was a mistake to have the stupid little beasts come. For once I was ready to side with Cousin Laura; there really was no sense in making an Infant Asylum of Uplands.

By and by Granny came to the end of her breath so she had to stop, and for a long minute there wasn't a sound in the room; though that thundery feeling was still in the air, and the rain outside rained very loud through the quietness. It's funny, but the least thing will set grown-ups by the ears, and you never can tell when they'll get over it. Cousin Laura was the first to speak—not that she meant to put an end to the unpleasantness, by any means.

"And when do these paragons arrive?" she asked.

Granny laughed; the sort of a laugh you give when you know you've been blowing, and you're kinder ashamed and yet proud of it at the same time.

"Let me see," she said slowly, as if she liked to keep Cousin Laura on tender-hooks, "Peter sails the day after to-morrow, he's

obliged to go to England very unexpectedly. He intended to bring the children here later in the summer, but as his plans have been changed they will come without him. It's quite time the cousins became acquainted with one another; Jack is only a month younger than the twins, and Sheila is between Gilbert and Margery. They've never met since that Christmas, you remember, when they were all here; I'm sure you didn't complain of any disturbance then."

"Not then," Cousin Laura owned darkly; "but those precious twins—Phil and Judy—were about six, and in the five years that have elapsed since they've developed unsuspected resources of mischief, and so have the others. Who would have dreamed then that Baby Margery, with her innocent, lovely little face, would ever be guilty of such a piece of destructiveness as she was the other day?"

"Oh! the child didn't mean any real harm," Granny interrupted, "we exaggerated her——"

"Exaggerated?" snapped Cousin Laura, "I wonder at you! She not only did wrong—she meant it, too, and she was let off entirely

too easily. But you wouldn't listen to me. You lack firmness. I only hope that a quarter of what you say about Jack and Sheila is true, for then they may, at least, act as a check on the others, though it would be too much to expect them to work any great reform."

I punched one of the cushions with a noiseless fist. How I wished it was Jack Ronald's head! Let him come checking it over me—if he dared, let him try his reforming! Sheila wouldn't be my quarry, but I meant to warn Judy.

"Well, they are good children—poor, little motherless ones," Granny said thoughtfully, "and the others are dear children, and fairly good, too; a trifle wild, perhaps, because they've had no school training, but that's all. Probably we were no better when we were their age."

"I never squeezed currant juice over a frock of mine to embellish it, as Margery did," Cousin Laura returned with unnecessary spirit; "if I had, I should have been soundly punished, I know. My mother was a strict woman and she brought up her children so they were a glory to her."

"And yet you ruined a lot of tomato catsup when you were six, by putting salt into it as soon as the cook's back was turned," Granny laughed triumphantly. "I've heard the story often."

"Ah, I thought I was helping," Cousin Laura said in quite a different tone, it had more bend to it, somehow; "still that excuse didn't save me from punishment. I was locked up for the rest of the day, I remember, and I had to learn 'The Nightingale and the Glow-worm,'—a very odious poem, my dear. Are Jack and Sheila to stay all summer?"

I leaned closer against the curtain to hear Granny's answer. If there were to be months of attempts at checking, I wanted to know it at once.

"Yes," she replied, "Peter won't be back until the middle of September, then he will come here for a short visit and when he returns to town he will take the boys with him. He has made arrangements for Jack to go to the same boarding-school as Phil and Gilbert."

Again I hammered the pillow in a dumb rage, and something choked in my throat and got out before I could strangle it. I thought,

then, that it was all up with me and waited with a stationary heart. The silence was quite creepingly awful for a minute.

"Really, Laura," Granny cried sharply, "I don't see any occasion to groan like that——"

"I didn't groan," Cousin Laura declared in a great huff. "You're determined to find fault this morning. First it's sniff, and then it's groan, and I—absolutely innocent of doing either—as if I would! I simply moved my chair a trifle with no intention of interrupting, or commenting upon, your remarks. Naturally, I'm interested in the stay of these *very* good children, in conjunction with that of children who, according to you, are dear and good, although I fail to recognize such a description of them. But there is little use in prolonging our conversation; some other day you will tell me, perhaps, if Sheila's visit has a limit or if it is to be a continuous affliction."

"I beg your pardon," Granny said soothingly, "but I thought you'd groaned in derision. I'm sorry to have offended you. Still, if my furniture is going to make a noise like that, it's quite time it was brought to my attention so that steps may be taken about hav-

ing it oiled, or broken up for kindling-wood. One thing is certain, nerves cannot be upset in this fashion. What were you saying? Oh, about Sheila—she'll be here through October, then she'll join her father in town and go on studying with that charming Miss Maitland. Tom is going to bring the children to Uplands, and we must keep him some weeks, at least."

"Tom's a dear fellow," Cousin Laura put in heartily (I didn't know she could speak like that!). "When do they come?"

"Friday afternoon," Granny answered, "and this is Monday. Would you tell Phil and the others, or would you keep it as a surprise?"

"I wouldn't tell them a word," Cousin Laura interposed quickly, "they'd be sure to do something dreadful the moment your back was turned. If you take my advice you'll keep them in irons Friday, so they will present a respectable appearance—you can't have forgotten how they looked when the Grahams were here."

"After all, it will be jollier for them not to know," Granny went on, as if she hadn't heard

what had been said. "Surprises are great fun; I'll get Cook to help us——"

"Us!" sniffed Cousin Laura. "Pray don't include me in your surprises. The only reason I suggested secrecy was that Tom might have one favorable impression of his nephews and nieces, though they must be kept chained until after the arrival. Dear me! I wonder if it is *ever* going to stop raining?"

Somehow, though I couldn't see her—though I didn't dare take the least squint—I felt that she had got up from her chair, and then I knew, just as if there were no curtains between us, that she was walking across the room. For when people wonder out loud about the weather, the next thing they do is to look at the sky themselves; they won't take anyone else's word for it. So I was done for! The window was down on account of the rain, it was pretty heavy, too, and if I tried to open it, it would probably stick; but even if it didn't, it would make no end of a racket going up and that would give me away. Nothing, then, could hide my flying figure. And yet, bad as it was, there was the barest chance of escape for me. If the other window were nearer,

Cousin Laura would stop there; only I couldn't tell that, because I never once had had a glimpse of where she and Granny were sitting. The heavy rug deadened the sound of her footsteps, though I could hear a distinct rustling—not of wings (you needn't think she had a pair of *those!*), but of a long gown trailing over the floor, and it came nearer—and ever nearer. . . . It wasn't going to the other window at all. My time had come! I shut my eyes, and took a long breath.

Then something happened.

Above that fateful silken rustling, and louder than the pounding of my heart, there was another sound. It was as if someone had jumped to the floor from a little height, and had jumped—hard! With one accord, Granny and Cousin Laura shrieked aloud; the sort of a shriek that means a bat, or a mouse, or a burglar—you don't know which. In an instant the bit of purple gown, that had shown between the curtains of my hiding-place, swooped past like a sail driven by the fury of a tempest. I was saved! Suddenly I seemed caught up in some great merry-go-round and whirled about till I couldn't tell my head from

my heels. It had all happened so quickly I could scarcely believe my good fortune; then I pushed the curtain back a little and peeped out, though I might just as well have stepped down boldly, because nobody paid any attention to me.

Granny was standing up, newly arisen from her chair, gazing for all she was worth at some object beyond her, and Cousin Laura had borne down upon the object with a day-of-reckoning expression written all over her figure. Even as I looked, she stretched out a white, untrembling hand and clutched the object's shoulder. I gazed in wonderment, glued to the spot as you are in a dream when you want to get away from a bull, and cannot.

There stood Judy, very red in the face—with her eyes big, and brown, and shiny, back of her spectacles, and her mouth screwed into a button. She'd been hiding, too. Afterwards she told me that, as soon as Gilbert and Margery were deep in their hospital game, she'd started off to roust me up, for, of course, she suspected where I'd gone. But when she peeked at me and saw me fathoms deep in my book, she thought it would be a mighty mean

trick to play on a fellow—Judy's a trump, and no mistake!—so she got hold of a book herself and lay low in the other window, and all would have gone well if Granny and Cousin Laura had stayed in the Blue room where they belonged. You must know that Judy isn't one of the born kind, either—the eavesdropping was forced upon her, too; she simply had to stay. She felt it never would do to pop out, for frights are bad for ladies' nerves, she says, and she hoped Granny and Cousin Laura would go away quickly without discovering us; only she trembled like an axle-tree for me and for herself all the time. Then when Cousin Laura got up to look out at the weather she knew I was a goner, and—well, you see—she wouldn't allow that. Judy is like the gallant thingumajig who took all the enemy's spears into his own breast to save his comrades.

"My dear child," Granny began slowly, and her voice sounded more sorry than angry.

"Dear child, indeed," Cousin Laura cut in. "Dear child! So it was you, Miss, who sniffed, you who groaned—you little, prying, meddling busybody——"

Now, it's more than flesh and blood can

stand to be called names and to be shaken, into the bargain, like a limp, backboneless rag when you aren't guilty. But Judy is game through and through, so I knew she'd stay mute and inglorious like some village Milton; only if you think I'd let any one catch it for me—and particularly a girl—it shows you don't know me, that's all!

"Hands off!" I called loudly. "I'm the sniffer, and the groaner." Then I descended from my window-seat, and my descension was more upsetting that Judy's had been.

Cousin Laura, who was in the midst of giving another shake to her victim's poor, unprotesting shoulder, let go her hold so suddenly that she toppled back against the wall, and Judy all but sat down on the floor in a hurry; while Granny's chair—or, perhaps, it was Granny herself—uttered a queer squeak as she leaned heavily against it. Then it grew very still—and remained so.

"And these are honorable children," Cousin Laura cried at last, "honor-r-r-able children!"

I didn't like the way she made syllables of one word as if she wanted us to spell it, and the gargling of the "rs"—there must have

been a dozen of 'em—was like the rattle of artillery. I could see that Judy was no end hurt, but I couldn't think of a solitary thing to say.

"We came to read," Judy said softly, looking over at Granny as if she would understand.

"And stayed to listen," Cousin Laura interrupted. "Well, as I've remarked, that proclaims you very hon-or-r-a-ble children."

Thumbscrews were mild to her voice, and still Granny wouldn't speak.

"I'm sure," Judy faltered, "we didn't mean any harm, we were both reading when you came in, and we couldn't very easily get out; besides, I thought you'd go every moment, and I know Phil thought so, too."

"Yes I did," I hastened to add, though somehow it sounded rather silly. That word honorable had knocked my senses into a cocked hat.

Granny shook her head.

"Those are poor excuses," she said, "and I am astonished and pained at your conduct. As it happens, Cousin Laura and I were not talking secrets, though it did occur to me to keep your cousins' visit a surprise——"

"We won't breathe it to the others," I interposed quickly, "you can trust us."

Cousin Laura gave a nasty laugh, and Granny looked at me sadly.

"I suppose I might trust you," she went on, "but I refuse to take you into partnership with me in this matter; if I did, it would mean that I thought lightly of your actions, which is not the case. I'm sure Jack and Sheila would never be guilty of such conduct—they would know better. You both knew better, as I can see by your faces, and that is why I can't excuse you. What! grandchildren of mine—eavesdroppers."

She straightened herself and all in a moment, though she is little compared to Cousin Laura, if you could have seen her you'd never have thought of inches. Her tallness was of another kind, it seemed to fill the room. And she said things. Things that hurt—and made us feel small, and red, and uncomfortable, though she wasn't just jawing because she was angry. They were solemn things, too, about honor—only she didn't drag out the word like Cousin Laura, she said it as if she loved it, and wanted us to love it, too. But we

did; we'd always loved it. Even in the midst of eavesdropping we'd both known the wrongness of what we were doing; and yet we'd gone on listening, making believe to ourselves that we had to keep hidden for fear of scaring Granny and Cousin Laura, when that was only a baby reason, and the real one was wanting to hear about the Ronalds kids. Well, there are some deeds you can't explain—not even to yourself.

After Granny had finished she stood for a moment watching us, and her eyes were very sweet and sorry-looking; I really think she meant to send us away then; I'm sure she felt we wouldn't forget in a hurry. But Cousin Laura had to put her oar in—she never knows when to be through.

"Now don't be weak, Janet," she cried; "you can't afford to let this morning's scandalous transaction go unpunished. Remember the other children. You must be fir-r-m!"

Granny got quite red and closed her lips tight. She doesn't like to be interfered with —who does? But it's worse to be called weak, and to be told to be firm in a voice that means

you can't be, no matter how much you try. It hurries you into injustices.

"Children, bring me the books you were reading," she said sharply.

We did as we were bid and she looked at the titles, lifting her eyebrows queerly, then she fluttered the leaves for a few minutes, until she seemed to decide in her mind what to do; after which, she walked to the writing-table and took some paper from a drawer.

"Philip, sit here," she commanded, "Judith, you sit opposite. Now both of you write at the top of the page in front of you, 'Honor is the subject of my story.' Have you written that? Yes? Very good. It's an excellent sentiment, and you will each write it out fifty times in your best handwriting. As for these books, I shall lock them up, and whether I ever let you have them again depends upon what your parents say. I think 'Monte Cristo' and 'Jane Eyre' are rather grown-up reading for you, still they will decide that point."

I didn't dare glance at Judy, but I could feel my clothes getting very tight across my chest. I was in the most thrilling part of my

book, and it was more than humane nature could endure without kicking to have it taken away. It was pretty tough on poor old Jude, too; she was just in the middle of the dandiest scene about a crazy woman, she told me afterwards. But there was no help for it—we simply had to swallow hard and go on writing those dreadful words.

Cousin Laura still gazed at Granny, and Granny looked back at her, and her eyes snapped. Then she opened her lips again and we knew that there was to be more of the punishment; it was one of the continuing kind.

"I believe you are to have chocolate whips for your dinner," she remarked quietly. "Do you care for them?"

"Well, ra—ather," I answered, for though I saw what was in the wind, I would scorn to speak falsely about a favorite.

"Oh! I adore them," Judy cried, clutching herself over her heart in the foolish way girls have.

Granny laughed grimly.

"I'm glad you are both so honest," she said, "though that doesn't alter my determination. You will go without them to-day. I shall give

Sophy instructions—no, on second thought, I leave this matter entirely to your honor, and I feel sure you will obey my wishes. Now, go on with your tasks."

Then she threw back her head and looked again at Cousin Laura. And Cousin Laura nodded. I suppose even *she* considered that there had been enough firmness for one morning.

## CHAPTER III

### JUDY'S PLAN

We were always glad to make new friends—for, as the proverb remarks, "The more the merrier," and we knew that to be true. Only, of course, it depends on what the more are like. Certainly, if they're stupid little beasts of children, whose one mission in life is to be Checkers and Reformers, then they may be more, but they can't very well be the other thing. Judy and I felt this all too darkly, though we didn't shatter the innocent ignorance which Gilbert and Margery displayed. Time enough, we thought, for them to learn the truth when the Checkers settled down among us and tried to begin their checking; we determined to let our youngers be light-hearted a little longer.

Granny told them the news the same day Judy and I found it out for ourselves, though she didn't say anything about the reforming qualities of our blooming young cousins; she

just stated facts, and her hearers drank in her words with joy showing indecently bare on their faces. Margery cried, "Oh! how scrumptious!" in that soft little way she has, and put her cheek against Granny's hand, and Gilbert said, "Hooray!" not too loudly, for we were all in the drawing-room and he is a most far-seeing boy; but Granny heard him and she looked contented with two of her grandchildren, at least. Even when we were upstairs in our own quarters again, those kids kept on rejoicing—they were honestly glad. Margery went about wondering what Sheila looked like—as if that made any difference!—and, as if our precious cousins were coming the next minute, she got out her dolls and undressed them to their joints, and then togged them up in their best clothes, while Gilbert fell to polishing his things like fury. And all this grubbing was for Checkers—for Reformers!

Judy and I looked grimly on. We'd have scorned to bring the least shine to any article we owned, or even to have bound up gaping wounds. There wasn't going to be any getting-ready business on our parts for the newcomers if we knew it. Aside from what they

were—horrid little prigs!—they'd made us do a blushable thing, and remembering it was like pressing your fingers on a brand-new bruise —you know how that feels! We'd suffered enough because of the precious pair and we meant they should pay for it. But we knew that just at first we must conceal our dark intentions behind false and sickly grins and keep our iron hands shod in velvet. It wouldn't be easy, still we were sure we could do it, and as soon as possible we'd throw away our masks and fall on the intruders without any gloves at all.

Friday morning dawned bright and clear, and I woke early. There was a sort of tingling in the air as if something nice was going to happen, though I couldn't make out what it was, as I looked wonderingly about. Gilbert was lying on his back, in his own bed, with his mouth ajar letting off steam like a good fellow, and I got a firm hold of my pillow to heave it at him when my eyes lighted on something beyond—something I'd forgotten. A third bed. And then I knew! And that jolly, going-to-happen feeling scuttled off in a jiffy. Of course I'd noticed the bed the night before

and had fallen asleep thinking about it, but it had clean gone from my mind so the sight of it in the morning light gave me a queer feeling at my waist-line. The Checker was to be put in our room. Well, it was a big place and I couldn't quarrel with Granny's arrangements, no matter how much I hated them. She'd given this wing of the house over to us; the girls had a bedroom almost as large as ours, with a smaller one opening out of it which was to be for the other Reformer; Hannah's diggings were at one end of the hall, beautifully remote from us, and at the other was the big schoolroom where Mother, and Uncle Peter, and Uncle Tom had studied and larked when they were young uns. We had our meals in the breakfast room below, and our own stairs went right down to its door. It really was like having a house all to ourselves, and we four had thought it pretty fine; but somehow that bed, with its brass knobs twinkling impudently in the sun, made me change my mind.

I glared at it again and the thought of doing something to it lifted a load off my spirits. If the duffer took the trick well that

would be a mark to his credit; but if he went and blabbed, I'd soon settle him. At any other time I'd have let Gilbert into the plan, but he'd been so sickeningly glad about Jack's coming that he didn't deserve it. He might hold off, too, and though I knew I could talk him around, I decided to attend to affairs by myself. I gripped my pillow tighter. Gilbert really did snore too loud; if the other boy tried the same game my hands would be full.

"Shish!" breathed a voice from the door.

I dropped the pillow like a shot. Thank goodness, I hadn't let it fly. Gilbert gave a louder snort than ever, though I didn't stop to have it out with him; in a second I was across the room at Judy's side.

"Isn't it dreadful that it's so sunny?" she whispered. "I did so long for rain, and see what's happened. I wanted it to pour cats and dogs—Oh! wouldn't it be lovely, Phil, if the dear dogs (I don't care for cats) would fall and descend upon this house like the rain did upon the houses in the Bible, the ones built on the sand, and on the rock? Only I suppose they'd all be sky-terriers, and I'm not very fond of that kind. Give me foxes, and set-

ters, and wire-hairs, and mongrels, and all the other darlings. Wouldn't it be howlingly lovely if they'd just come pelting down?"

"You bet it would," I answered, then I added dolefully, "I say, you're right, this is a beastly day——"

"No, that's what the other would have been —the one I wanted," Judy giggled, "the one that will never happen if we live to the mill—something or other. Of course, I wasn't goose enough to expect it. I'd have been satisfied with a nice, steady, sopping rain all day long, getting worse about five o'clock so the windows of the omnibus would be all spattery and unsee-out-able. And it would have been so good for the growing things, too. Were you asleep when I called?"

"Not me," I growled. "What do you take me for? I haven't been asleep for ages—I'm not like that fellow there—just listen to his row. Somehow, I couldn't sleep."

"Neither could I," sighed Judy. "Come along to the schoolroom where we can talk things over."

She darted down the passageway and I followed at her heels; once in the room we made

a bolt for the big window-seat, both of us landing there at the same time. Judy curled herself up at one side and, after I'd raised the sash, I plumped down opposite. But we didn't look at each other at first, we just looked out. I tell you what, it's pretty jolly being up in the early morning before the day has had a chance to get crowded and tired. There's such a spick-span newness about everything, it gets under your very skin; and the smells are delicious, and the birds so tunable. The all of it makes you kinder still though, what with looking, and sniffing, and listening.

"Hmm! this *is* better," Judy said, with a long breath, "rain smells are good, and no mistake, only they can't hold a candle to these. I suppose the rest of the folks will be glad, so we must bear up under it. Now, the omnibus windows will be open, unless Granny sends the wagonette, and that's more than likely. It will come bowling up the drive, and everyone will call out to everyone else——"

"I shan't be there," I interposed darkly.

"Oh, yes, you will," Judy declared, with a positiveness that didn't become her, "Granny'll make you. I'm sure she'd be awfully vexed if

you even hinted at staying away. No, I s'pect we'll be 'tethered to a stone' like the snow-white mountain lamb, until afternoon, then we'll be let go and, after we're dressed up fit to kill, we'll have to wait around on the veranda to welcome those others."

"What, made into a holy show for those reformers," I groaned, "I just won't stand it——"

"You'll have to," persisted Judy, shaking her head solemnly, her long, brown pig-tails waving to and fro; "you'll have to, and I'll have to—Gilbert and Margery don't count, because they love it—but there we'll all be nodding, and grinning, and looking so glad to see our new cousins, and Granny and Cousin Laura will be back of us, dressed up, too, and grinning likewise. It'll be like having a family group taken. Then the carriage will stop and Uncle Tom and those others will get out, and then there will be kiss——"

"Do shut up," I cried. "I wish to goodness you'd stayed in bed. I can't imagine why you ever came bothering a fellow when your mind was filled with such horrid thoughts. But, if you think there'll be any kissing on my part,

you know nothing about it. Just let anyone try—that's all I have to say. You'll have to kiss, and be kissed, that's expected; girls always do those silly things, but none of that for me—thank you."

"I won't do it, either," Judy retorted, her face very red and puckery, "I won't give a kiss of welcome to anybody that I don't welcome from my innermost soul, and what's more—I won't take one."

"There's no escape for you," I continued, and I didn't try to keep my voice from being nasty. "Uncle Tom will kiss you, and Granny will tell Jack to, and he'll do it—one of those little pecky kisses that catch you anywhere, on your nose, or chin, or ear—but probably he won't like it any better than you, and Sheila will do it of her own accord. Je-rusalem! I wouldn't stay away from a circus like that for a kingdom. It will be great nuts."

"Whose horrid now?" Judy demanded huffily.

"Well, you began it," I answered in the same key, then we both laughed; we never stayed mad very long. But there was a lot of uncomfortableness in our laughter, for we

knew that much of what had been said would have to come true. We sat gazing at each other while the morning grew brighter about us.

"I really can't see that there's any escape for you," I said gloomily, and this time there was nothing in my voice to anger anyone; I was truly sorry for her—she couldn't help being a girl. "You've just got to grin and bear it. Of course, it's nonsense about my kissing Uncle Tom and the kids—polite hand-shaking is the ticket, but that's hard enough—considering how I feel toward those little beggars. What I hate is this dressing up in their honor."

"Yes, that's pretty bad," Judy agreed, "though it's far worse for me, as usual; I have to be so starched and spandy fresh. Boys never look as dressed up as girls, they're more every-dayish, except for their shiny faces and their plastered hair. Somehow, company-hair always shows more in a boy than in a girl—and it's so unbecoming. But even with that you have it easier than we, and especially——" her face grew very glum, then all of a sudden it lighted up. "Why, Philip Egerton," she cried

triumphantly, "you can't be sure that Granny won't order you to kiss just as she orders Jack, you're only a month older than he——"

"She'd better not try," I interrupted hotly.

"And you'll have to do it," Judy went on; "you'll have to give Sheila one of those little pecky kisses you know so much about—you can't get out of it."

"You wait and see, Miss," I growled, then I stepped to the floor. "Well, I've had enough of this racket, I'm off to dress," I said, moving dignifiedly away from the window, but Judy pulled me back by the sleeve of my pyjamas.

"Don't be cross, Phil," she urged, "you know in your heart she might order it."

My heart and I were very conscious to what lengths even the best grandmothers may go, which probably accounted for the lowness of my spirits. And flat rebellion wouldn't save me. I knew that, just as I also knew that I would have to be one of the welcomers; Granny would consider any absence at such a time a slight to her guests. Now, it's rather a strange thing that though I hated—HATED—having those Checkers come, I wouldn't have missed their arrival for a good

deal. And Judy owned up to this, too. In the early morning you have to be honest—you can't help it. So that's how it was with us both, only, if we could have looked on without being seen ourselves, we'd have liked that better; but instead, we were doomed to take part in the general hullabaloo. I hadn't dreamed of kissing that strange, reforming girl though, until Judy put it into my head, and the idea was like wormwood to me, which, they say, is both tough and bitter. Jack was beside the question. No grandmother in the world would tell one boy to kiss another, especially if they wrote their ages with two figures, so I was safe there. It was just that Sheila kid I had to think of. And suddenly I felt that Judy's fate and mine were unescapable. I looked at her—quite wordless.

"I'm not going to do it," she whispered, after a moment, very decidedly. "I shan't do it, and they won't do it to me, either, not one of them—not even Uncle Tom."

I didn't say anything, at least with my lips.

"Well, I shan't," she said again, "I'll have a toothache."

"That won't let you off," I sniffed.

"Mine will," she declared, without getting a bit mad. "I'll look worse than screaming. They'll just shake hands with me and say they're sorry, and they'll all think me a regular hero—well, shero, if you like that any better—to stand there so uncomplaining, trying to take part in the gay and giddy scene. And all the while your sister will be laughing in her sleeve at fooling them so nicely."

I stared wonderingly at her, as she continued to wag her head.

"Does it ache now?" I demanded.

"No," she answered, getting down from her place, "but it will begin right after breakfast, just a tiny ache before Gilbert and Margery, so as to pull the wool over their eyes. I'll stay quiet all morning, then after dinner the real misery will come on—the groaning kind, and the swelling—a wad of paper will do, or something round—they won't have time then to send me into town to the dentist's."

"You can't come it over them," I interrupted, "they'll want to look for themselves."

"No they won't, if I say it hurts too much," Judy giggled, "I'm not afraid. It's to be the far-backest tooth—but, if they insist on look-

ing, I'll pull my cheek out myself and they won't see what's made it swell."

She strutted off to the door, trailing her pink wrapper by one of its sleeves far behind her, and putting on a lot of swagger.

"I'll have my head tied up in a bandage," she added, smiling at the picture. "That will make an Object of Pity out of me, and it will look so nice and hijus I shan't mind the best clothes at all. Oh! I've quite decided."

I stood still—gaping at her, lost in admiration of her scheme.

"Don't you want to do it, too?" she coaxed. "It'll be lots jollier if you will. And anyway——" she paused a moment, then she added meaningly, "Granny really may—you know."

I knew. Besides, there was much in her idea that pleased me. It was bully. Still I must have a care. One swelled face might pass, where two would start questions in the breasts of others—especially Cousin Laura's. But Judy wouldn't see that. She was sure two persons might easily have the toothache at the same time, and she went on to point out that all over the world many people must have swelled faces when others did, for misery loves

company, Duke says, and is often very catching. She was willing to run the risk. I had to be quick about making up my mind; it was growing late, and the others would soon be up. If Judy and I had toothaches together we mustn't appear to be conspirators, and the same was true if she were the only sufferer. She knew her secret was safe with me if I didn't join her, but the more I thought of the plan, the more I wanted to take part in it. We stood whispering a few minutes longer; then we parted and went back to our rooms.

Gilbert was fast asleep, though not as noisily as before, but he waked as I crept into bed. Instantly he sat up grinning widely.

"Hullo!" he shouted. "Avast there, my hearty, it's time to be stirring. Isn't it bully that it's such a fine day?"

"Do leave a fellow alone," I groaned from the depths of my pillow. "And stop your racket. I've got an awful pain in one of my grinders."

"Oh! I say now, isn't that too bad?" he cried, and his voice sounded truly sorry. "And to-day of all days! Is it a waggly one?"

"No, it isn't," I roared savagely. "See here,

you keep your oar out of this. You understand? I don't want to be trotted off to the dentist, if I can help it."

He sat staring at me for a full minute, shaking his head like a Chinese mandolin.

"Well, I should think not," he declared with a whistle. "But you needn't worry, red-hot pinchers won't draw it from me."

## CHAPTER IV

### THE ARRIVAL OF THE REFORMERS

Our toothaches slowly but steadily grew worse. The greater part of the morning Judy lay curled up on the lounge on the veranda just outside of the Blue room, looking limp and languish (somehow a girl can go to pieces easier than a boy). She had the place to herself, for Granny had been called away and we were allowed to sit there if we were quiet. Judy had a book, though she took no interest in it; oftenest she lay still, gazing at the trees, and pretty nearly always with her hand against her pillowed cheek. A wad of cotton was rammed half in her ear, and a camphorated smell, mingled with oil of wintergreen, arose from her couch of pain. Margery, chock-full of fear lest Judy should be hustled off to the dentist's, kept bringing different remedies hidden in her dress to the sufferer, who bore all such attentiveness with a sweet and gentle patience which Margery ought to have seen

through, only she was so excited about the afternoon's performance that she didn't.

It was a piping hot day and after twelve o'clock there was no danger of a journey into town, so about that time more open symptoms appeared in the shape of some heart-wringing "Oh! dears," which Judy let escape her parted lips, when she was supposed to think she was all alone. Now, as everyone knows, a single "Oh! dear," murmured in private is worth a dozen shouted, in the public eye. Cousin Laura was evidently of that opinion, too; she had been writing letters at Granny's desk and when the maiden uttered her cry of woe she came right to one of the windows and stood looking out at the writhing form. I knew that, because I was peeking through the vines waiting my turn to come on the scene; and Judy knew, for, you see, she'd known all along who was in the room behind her. But she gave no sign. She just ejaculated a miserabler, longer-drawn-out "Oh! dear," half into the pillow, and that did the business. Cousin Laura hurried out at once.

"What's the matter, child?" she asked quickly, but not unkindly.

Judy started up quite wildlike, as if something had gone off unexpectedly under the couch.

"Nothing, Cousin Laura," she stuttered, "nothing, only a teeny toothache that will go away soon, I guess."

"You poor little thing," Cousin Laura cried. "Have you had it long?"

"Not very long," Judy answered, making her voice very brave and polite, "pretty nearly all morning, but not long, thank you. It'll be better soon."

"You must have some menthol immediately," Cousin Laura declared. "Hm! you've been using camphor—I thought I smelled it—well, camphor's no good, menthol is much better. I really think your face is swollen, child. Let me see where the trouble is."

"It's more feelable, than seeable," Judy groaned, "it's so sensatif inside." She staggered to her feet and opened her mouth, holding the cheek back with her thumb and forefinger. I shook in my shoes as Cousin Laura, with her stick-glasses held close to her eyes, bent down and peered into the cavernous depths. It was a perilous moment; then the

danger passed, and I breathed freely once more. Cousin Laura dropped her glasses.

"No, I can't see a thing," she said. "Are you sure it's that upper tooth? Well, well, there must be some reason to account for the swelling, but now you won't have so much pain. You're a good, brave child, and the first thing in the morning we'll go to Dr. Perry—it's too late to-day. I'll ring for the menthol, and your grandmother has some toothache drops, so we'll see if we can't make matters a little easier."

She bustled away, and really, she didn't seem a bit bad sort; which only shows that people are made up of lots of different parts, like the dissected pictures, and they aren't all one color, so if you don't like them for the whole, you can care for certain spots. When she came back she insisted on Judy's lying down again, and fixed things comfy with her very own hands and a hot-water bag. Then she went off to her letters, and as soon as the coast was clear I came on deck.

Judy said afterwards that I looked agonies, and I knew I did, for I'd been practicing the morning long. I sat down near her and dabbed my face with the menthol, purposely letting

some of it get into my eye. It smarted, I can tell you, but it made my expression more pained and bleary, so I didn't mind. Then I used the toothache drops—horrid tasting things they were, too!—and I tried to cheer Judy, because, as I remarked (this was said very out loud that it might be heard), we were two of a kind. And so Granny and Cousin Laura discovered when they joined us just before their luncheon. They never suspected us a minute, and it was worse than having teeth pulled—almost!—to have them so tender-hearted, and so getting-in-the-way-of-each-other in their attentions. We hadn't dreamed they would tumble so easily. But they just heaped cartloads of burning coals on our heads. I will pass over our feelings. Well, it was those Checkers who'd made us stoop to deceit—I hope you see that as plainly as we did.

We went off to our dinner and tried to eat bravely, as we'd been ordered. It was not a difficult matter. Sophy's thoughts were elsewhere, and Gilbert and Margery were so well taken in they never doubted us; besides, they were jabbering lickety-split about the preparations. They'd watched the running up of the

big flag in honor of the guests (though those Ronalds kids needn't get swelled heads over *that,* it was up for us!), they'd tagged everywhere at the servants' heels, and they'd even crept into Cook's quarters, as polite as you please, just to see what was for our supper. She was in a good temper—which was well for them!—so they came away from that visit quite satisfied—outside and in. All this they told us over and over, and we hadn't a word to say. Remorse was beginning to nibble at our vital parts as the vulture did at the Spartan boy's. But we'd started out to do the thing and we had to carry it through, only it wasn't as much fun as we'd expected. It was such baby work tricking them all. Still, we couldn't draw back —it was too late. At least there wouldn't be any kissing business for—as Judy whispered—looks might be as catching as some fevers and if that were so, people would steer pretty clear of us.

You'd have thought they would, if you could have seen us when we joined the other Welcomers. They were in their Sunday best, and so were we, but while merriment sparkled in their eyes (like the girl's in Bingen on the

Rhine), pain was written in big letters all over our faces. We both wore bandages passed under our chins and fastened on top of our heads with up-standing ends. Hannah had made them lie flat, though we'd soon rescued them from that fate. I was bad enough, but Judy touched the highest notch of awfulness, for, besides her protubering cheek, she'd chosen to wear her spectacles. Granny gave us one look as we took our places, then she walked to the far end of the veranda and stood gazing off at the view with her back turned to us. Cousin Laura didn't budge; she just held her glasses up to her eyes and stared, and kept on staring, until I thought she'd found out our little game. Even my feet got cold.

"It is most peculiar," she murmured at last, "really, most peculiar."

Then Granny came back.

"I'd no idea the swelling would increase so," she said, with lots of feeling in her voice, "I never saw anything like it. Are you sure that you want to remain here, children? Because if you don't, you may go upstairs; you needn't meet your cousins till you look more like your natural selves."

Judy's face fell, I mean the part of it that could fall—did, and her eyes grew very beseeching.

"There, there, my dear, you shall both stay," Granny cried hastily. "If you and Phil don't mind, I'm sure the others won't, and it may serve to break the ice. I've half a mind, Laura, to telephone for Dr. Grantley to come right over."

"Oh! Granny," I interposed thickly, and as quickly as I dared, "I don't believe the swelling will swell any more, it ain't so hard, somehow. I guess it looks worse than it feels now. The ache part has gone, for one thing."

"It's a pity the other part didn't go first," Cousin Laura said, dropping her glasses, "I don't know what the effect will be on your uncle."

"Here they are!" shouted Gilbert and Margery from the drive, then they raced back and took their stand in the foremost place, laughing, waving, shouting, and the next moment the carriage rolled up to the door. The Reformers had arrived.

Out sprang Uncle Tom, and as soon as he

had jumped down a small girl, with goldy-red hair and a grinning face, he made a bolt up the steps and caught Granny in his great arms. He seemed so glad to see her, and she seemed so extra glad to see him as she clung to him and kissed him again, and again, that we could only look on quite wordless, while the gladness sank right into our hearts. And after she let him go he actually put his arms around Cousin Laura and kissed her, too, as if he liked her. In the meantime, Granny hugged the Sheila kid, then she held her off a little way and peered at her, and then she hugged her again; presently she turned the checking one around as if she were a teetotum, and said:

"Sheila love, this is Margery, yes, you must kiss each other; and here is poor, dear Judy, with a toothache, and this is Philip—a sufferer, too. Shake hands, children—that's right. Now, Gilbert, you come and kiss your cousin."

And Gilbert, smirking like a heathen Chinee —without even a murmurous look, did as he was told; and what's more, he didn't seem to mind it in the least—he's such a gander! So you see what would have been expected of me

—what terrible fate would have been mine, if it hadn't been for Judy's beautiful scheming nature.

"Why, where's Jack all this while?" Granny demanded.

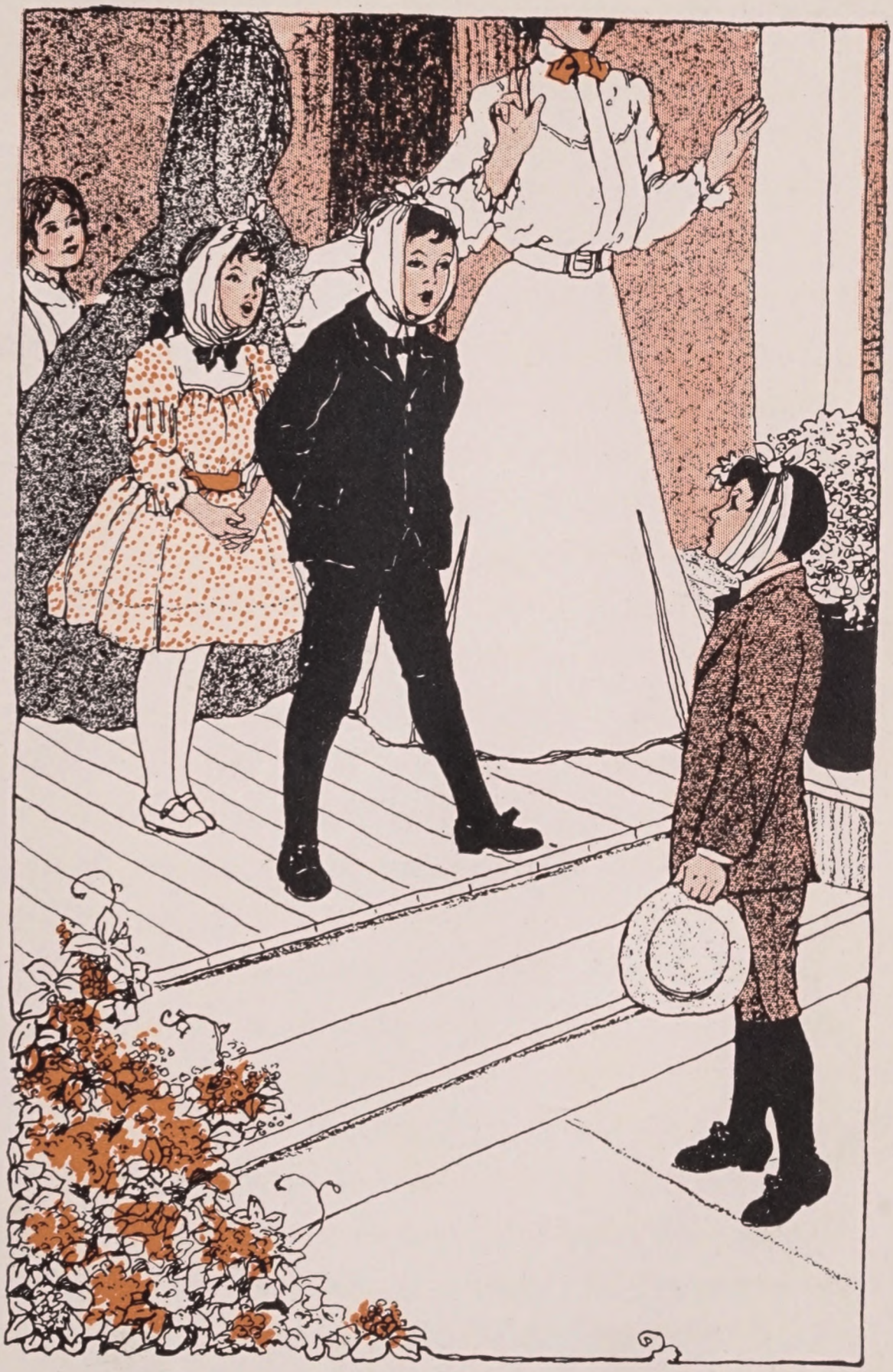
"Here I am," piped a thin voice, half wogglish, and half blustering. I'd my opinion of the fellow on the moment.

Granny gave a little scream, which Cousin Laura echoed—only more so.

"Another!" she cried.

She had been standing in front of me, but surprise, or something else, made her move back suddenly—and the Reformer was revealed. He was about my size, which was as it should be, if there were any questions to be settled between us; that much I saw before Granny's arms hid him from view, and yet, just as they closed about his unresisting form, I noticed one other thing—a handkerchief was bound tightly around his head. But bandages, no matter what—or where—they are, are never proof against grandmothers; if he'd counted on being let off there, he was pretty well sold.

"Another!" Cousin Laura cried again. "An Infant Asylum was bad enough, and so



"ANOTHER!" SHE CRIED

I told you, Janet Ronalds, but a hospital is ten times worse."

Uncle Tom glanced around quickly and gathered in her meaning. He had kissed Margery, and I'd noticed with relief that he'd shaken hands with Gilbert, as man to man, which showed his sense, but now he turned and saw Judy for the first time. And he looked her up and down for a long, wordless moment. She *was* a show! Then he caught sight of me and suddenly his face grew red—and redder—and there was a noise as of choking in his throat. He couldn't deceive me, though he got the better of it almost at once.

"Does it begin with 'M,' little maid?" he asked, as he shook hands with his suffering young niece.

"No, it isn't mumps," Judy answered, she's so quick you can't often catch her. "It begins with 'T,' thank you."

"And you, young man," he went on, holding out his other hand to me, "so you couldn't rout the enemy either? But what's an ache—more, or less—to the valiant-minded? Here's another uncomplaining hero. I trust you'll 'open the ring and let him in,' as the song says. A

cinder, wanting to set up a modest establishment of its own, 'located' in his eye, and that's why your Uncle Peter's son comes among you like one returning from the wars. Here, sir, embrace your cousins—oh! figuratively, my boy, figuratively—don't be alarmed. They've some respect for the trappings of woe. Birds of a feather may safely flock together."

The reformer, very crimson and hot to look at, joined us and Judy gave him a limp hand, which he shook without any ginger in his grasp. She stared at him with all her might, not speaking at all, then she petered out and did the unexpected—just like a girl!

"I'm so sorry it hurts you," she said softly.

"Oh! there's nothing the matter with me now," he answered, brisking up almost pleasantly, "I winked the thing right out, though, of course, a fellow has to be careful where his eye is concerned—light's bad for it, you know. But I say, you look like time!" He stopped suddenly and turned my way; as we shook hands with some show of friendliness, he actually had the sand to put his tongue into his cheek.

"See here," he said in a low voice that only

Judy and I could catch, "those bumps are really too bumptious, and they've woggled twice. You don't take me in by a long shot. I bet I know what you both got up the dodge for."

We wouldn't parley with such a person and moved back from him in scorn, but I was glad I'd fixed his bed pie-fashion. That thought consoled me, even as the dire peril closed round about us, for we were at his mercy. The next moment, however, I saw that, whatever else he might be, he wasn't a tell-tale. Judy drew a long breath.

"It takes a thief to catch a thief," the reformer whispered quickly. "I'm sure you did it for the same reason that I tied on this beastly handkerchief—relations ask altogether too much of a fellow, though I don't see just where you come in," he looked pointedly at Judy. "Well, never mind," he went on, "Uncle Tom told you to let me into your ring, and I guess you'd better—I know what I'm talking about, and what's more, I'll bet he does, too."

Judy glared at the speaker, then she looked past him at Uncle Tom, and I looked, too. The next second she ran over to Granny,

whispered something in her ear, and was off like a shot.

"The poor, dear child," Granny cried, "she's been so brave and uncomplaining the whole day, and there's no pain so hard to bear as the toothache."

I waited anxiously in the little hush that followed, wondering if I ought to speak, but Uncle Tom, evidently thinking my looks did that for me, broke the silence.

"You're right, Mother mine," he said, "'there was never yet philosopher that could endure the toothache patiently.'"

# CHAPTER V

## THE POET OF THE BREAKFAST-TABLE

A HALF hour after Sheila and Margery met they were chattering away as fast as lightning, with their arms round each other's waist, and long before they went to bed they'd exchanged rings and vowed vows of never-ending friendship. That's Margery all over, and Sheila is just such another! She steered clear of Judy, though, as if she couldn't quite get over the shock her looks had given her on arriving. She'd hardly had the decency then to shake hands with her, and she didn't seem sorry by a long shot. She was just dying to laugh. Well, I really couldn't blame her!

By supper-time Judy and I were pretty sick of the tied-up-ness of our faces which we'd endured patiently for hours. It was a hot, perspiratious night, and the bandages didn't make us feel comfy. Far from it. Still, there was no knowing if the grown-ups would want to see us again, or not, so we didn't dare do

away with the outer signs of our suffering; the inner we got rid of by degrees, till the swelling had entirely vanished from our glowing cheeks. No one noticed our ordinary flatness, however, as we took our places at table, except Jack—and he winked understandingly at us. But he didn't count. His own bandage was pushed back from his damp and noble brow, and he was seeing out of both eyes as well as ever. Why should we fear him? He was one of us, though there had been no changing ring business, you can better believe. He might be a reformer in other directions, but not in this particular one, and we breathed freely. It was not a long breath. Sophy had just brought in a huge white cake, glistening with that delicious, melt-in-your-mouth-in-a-minute frosting, with the word "Welcome" done in pink letters on the top, and had placed it in front of Sheila, whereupon we had all shouted as one man, and then—the blow fell!

Above our screaming came the sound of grown-up laughter, and there at the door stood Granny, and Cousin Laura, with Uncle Tom gazing over their shoulders. They'd stopped on their way to their own dinner, and the table

did look so pretty. Granny had let Sophy fix it extra scrumptious with some elderly things, and we had "oh'd," and "ah'd," when we first caught sight of the pink trimmings, and the little stuck-out pink shades on the candles that made the light rosy as it came through them and fell on the flowers, and on the fruit, and candy, in the low silver dishes. There was a mirror at one side of the room in which we could see the table reflected clearly with the six of us gathered round the festive board, happy, and careless, and unrecking, aught of intruders.

All in a jiffy my heart sank right down into my shoes and I knew Judy's had gone ker-flump, too, for I heard her give a shuddery gasp. Then she was still. Very. Somehow, I couldn't think clearly, but part of me was glad that we had had the sense to stick to our bandages. Uncomfortable as mine was, I fairly loved its damp folds, though I didn't dare draw it closer over my shrunken face, for I presented a front view to our visitors. And so did Judy. If they noticed any falling-off in our looks, however, they said nothing; they had come to praise, and to be pleased, and they

didn't leave for some minutes. When, at last, they did move away they left bitterness behind in the breasts of a few of our number. It was Granny who did it—smiling, tender-hearted Granny. She had evidently been told to be "firm."

"No, Sheila dear," she said gayly. "I won't have any of the cake, thank you, though it looks delicious and plummy, and I hope you will all enjoy it." Here she paused, and met the eyes of two of her grandchildren, who shall be nameless; hers were not the first to fall. Then she went on in the same jolly voice: "I didn't mean all. Phil and Judy, you will have to go without your share to-night on account of those poor aching teeth of yours, and you mustn't touch any of the other sweets, not even the ice-cream for the same reason. You understand? To-morrow we'll see Dr. Perry about the trouble."

"I think, Granny," Jack put in boldly, in the dreadful stillness that followed, "I think I hadn't better eat any of those things either—not even the cake of welcome."

Granny turned on him in astonishment.

"Why, my dear boy," she cried, "I've heard

that cinders were bad for cake, but never before that cake was bad for cinders. Still, you probably know your own case best, so you must judge for yourself."

"Well, I'm very sure I hadn't ought to eat what Phil and Judy mustn't," Jack declared in a firm voice, "and I won't."

"And thou too, Brutus," laughed Uncle Tom.

Then the truth dawned slowly upon Granny. You could see it growing in her face—and I thought the beginning of a smile trembled about her lips, though she went away so quickly I couldn't be certain. For a minute we three bandaged ones didn't so much as glance at one another, while the rest of the kids were mute —on account of surprise and cake. Judy was the first to move; she jumped up, almost overturning her chair in her hurry, and I followed her example, though more dignifiedly.

"You kids can go on stuffing down sweet things," I said coldly, "but I'm going to clear out. Only remember, there are other aches besides the toothache, so I warn you to stop in time."

I tore the bandage from my face as I fin-

ished speaking, and flung it far from me. Hannah had earlier put a hot potato in its folds to ease my swollen jaw, and now the white mass scattered over the floor like a snow-storm. I dodged quickly to avoid Sophy's wrath, and Jack came pelting close at my heels. It was pretty square of him to give up the best part of the grub, and it wasn't altogether necessary. There really had been a cinder in his eye, and though he'd winked it out almost directly and had only been suffering from a memory for reasons of his own, his pretense wasn't so pretentious, nor so deeply dyed as ours. Judy and I never dreamed of his sharing the same punishment with us, which shows you cannot always tell the best in humane nature at a glance. But he needn't have done it. His secret was safe with us. Besides, the feast was as much in his honor as in Sheila's, though, when we pointed this out to him afterwards, he said he knew it, and that was the principal reason why he hadn't stayed. The stuff would have choked him.

The next morning the three of us woke to an absolutely unaching world, but something Gilbert said at the breakfast-table brought

Judy and me up short and made us look glumly at each other. Pleasant as the day was, it was also a day of reckoning and a dark cloud hung over our guilty heads. Granny, backed by Cousin Laura, would be as good—or as bad—as her word. We felt in the very marrow of our souls that there was no escaping farther injustices. Where was the use then of planning any fun for the morning when it would have to be spent far otherwise? What Gilbert had said was this:

"Do you think you'll get any chink for it?"

And instantly Sheila, with a silly grin that showed little thought on her part for anybody, leaned forward and asked unfeelingly: "Is it a jiggling one, or a stick-tight?"

I wanted to say "Shut up" to her, but as the newness of her coming was still so fresh, I said it to Gilbert instead, in savage tones, and let her see it in my eyes. She understood right away and took a hasty swallow of water, quirking her little finger out from her glass in a foolish fashion, while Margery, who was on her side, of course, rushed into the breach.

"Open your mouth a little wider, Master Philip," she giggled, "a lit-tle wider."

I tossed back my head in lofty scorn and said nothing, but Judy shuddered all over. It wasn't put on, either. She's no end plucky about almost everything, and yet, there is a yellow streak of cowardice mingling in her otherwise brave young blood, as far as the dentist is concerned. She owns up to it with an unblushing mien (whatever that is, it's in a lot of books). The terrors of the Spanish Imposition are pale nothings, she says, compared to that other torture.

"Jack's made some poetry about the dentist," Sheila cried proudly. She seemed quite satisfied with her champion's efforts, and was ready to bury the hatchet. "You really ought to hear it, it's so—so——"

"Oh! do you do it, too?" Judy broke in eagerly, forgetting all about the prospect in store for her, now that she knew a brother poet was among us. "Do please say it."

Jack got fiery red and tried to wither Sheila with a stern glance, but she was unwitherable —sisters often are!—and only shook her head until every curl bobbed in a little dance of its own.

"If you won't, I will," she declared.

"Come, come," I cut in, "you're among

friends. Speak up, old chap, have no fear." I purposely made my voice as hearty as possible, though interiorly I couldn't help wondering how anyone with a soul for poetry could pick out such a subject to write about.

"Ah! do," breathed Margery, and Gilbert, who could go where he chose the whole morning long, called to him to fire ahead.

Well, a fellow couldn't stay bashful after all that urging, so Jack rose to his feet and struck an attitude.

"It's only a simple heartfelt lay," he began modestly, "but here goes:

"Looking with gravity
For any cavity—
Little or big;
Though you feel mutinous,
He's got to be scrutinous,
His work is to dig.
Oh! Ow!

"In he pokes boldly,
No matter how coldly
You glare in his face.
Then, when you give a
Right up-from-your-heels shiver.
He hits on the place.
O-oh!! Ow-w!!!"

He sat down and we cheered him to the echo. Even if we hadn't liked it, we'd have cheered him. That was our custom. We always encourage the doer, because—you know—it's something to do what you can, although it mayn't be much, and we never let anyone feel uncomfortable at such times. It's more terrible to have your feelings fall flat as a flounderer, than to have your body sink pronely to earth; your body can scramble up the quickest, somehow.

"Young man," I cried, when the din of exclamations had died down, "there's both truth and poetry in what you say——"

"It—it sounds like something I've heard," interrupted Judy. "Oh! dear, I don't mean that it isn't your own, Jack, every bit your own. I know it is, only there's such a familiarness about it, and that's why it seems as if I must have heard it somewhere."

Jack glowered gloomily before him. He was as mad as hops, and it really was too bad of Judy to let her tongue run away with her like that. You couldn't blame Jack for being angry—no one could. We others were dumb with confounding thoughts. It was a time of

great seriousness. Then Sheila, who'd been breathing like a porpoise, leaned across the table; two bright-red spots burned in her cheeks, and her hand was raised in a way that showed if she was a Checker, she'd certain ideas on the subject that were not unknown elsewhere.

"Do you mean to say my brother is a copy-cat?" she hissed. "Because I can tell you he isn't; he'd scorn to be one. You'd better take that back mighty quick, Judy Egerton."

"I haven't anything to take back," Judy snapped. "I didn't say he was a copier. I didn't mean that for a moment, and I'm awfully proud that he's my very own first cousin. I like the verses, too, they're so stayable in the mind; though all the same they really are——"

She stopped, and I trembled at what was coming next. Sheila's hand was still raised, and I knew Judy well enough to feel she wouldn't desert her guns if she thought she was in the right. She's sometimes uncomfortable that way.

"Oh!" she cried, all in a breath, "how stupid I've been. I know now why those verses

didn't seem quite new to me. It's because we've all been there ourselves."

Sheila settled back in her chair nodding contentedly, and Jack looked more comfortable right away, as if his wounded breast was healed once more.

"You can bet we've all been there," Gilbert chimed in, wagging his head wisely, though his voice sounded unpleasantly jolly. He never lived in the past, and the near future held no terrors for him. "I think Jack's poetry is prime—it comes so from the heart."

"Yes," I agreed dolefully, "it does, and that shows it's been lived through. It's dreadfully natural. And the familiarness Judy noticed is the voice of experience—the grown-ups are always talking about it—speaking to us. I tell you what, old chap, you must copy off the verses so I can send them out to Father."

"Hear, hear!" cried Judy and Margery together, drumming on the table with their knives and forks and making no end of a clatter. Sheila's smiles came out in all their glory, and Jack swelled like a turkey-cock, though I must say he tried his best not to show the

deepness of his feelings, which made him rather red and giggly. Yet it was a hard position and I couldn't blame the boy. One cloud, at least, had rolled away from our breakfast-table, the other still hung darkly o'er Judy's head and mine, and we could take but a half-hearted pleasure in the din around us. The poetry cast us down more than the others supposed; it touched us too nearly.

Sophy had been in and out from the pantry a dozen times or more, not bringing new dishes but merely *looking,* and each time she seemed less at peace with us, and more sorry for herself. It isn't a pleasant expression, still it often comes on servants' faces. We couldn't be blind any longer to such speaking glances; they simply drove us from the table. The other kids ran helter-skelter out to the lawn, but Judy twitched my sleeve and I stayed behind with her. Anyone, with half an eye, could have seen by her solemn looks that she had something impartable on her mind.

"What is it?" I asked after a minute, for we really couldn't hang around any longer. There was no knowing when Sophy, who was stumping angrily about, would brush us out

of the room as she was brushing the flies. "What's the racket now?"

"Oh! Phil," Judy cried, "I'm going to find Granny and throw myself at her feet—the way they do in books—and tell her everything."

"That's all nonsense," I growled, "you'll just have your trouble for your pains. She won't listen to us."

"Us!" broke in Judy. "Why, you won't have to go—it's only me. The toothache was all my idea. I'll tell Granny the truth, and then, if she won't let us both off, she'll have to let you, because she really tries to be fair."

"No, no," I returned gloomily, "share and share alike is our motto. If you're set on this seeking-out business, of course I'm your man, though perhaps it would be best for us to lie low and let the grown-ups do the seeking."

Judy shuddered all over and shook her head mournfully. "I couldn't enjoy a single breath," she declared, "what with thinking that at any moment I might be trotted off to the dentist, though there's no reason why we should be taken to him for a make-believe. Anyone would feel that. Not him, of course, he'd say he'd just take a look to be or the safe side. And

then he'd do it—oh! you know how. Why, it wasn't so long ago that I went to him anyway, and he was dreadfully "scrutinous"—up and down, and all around—poking something terrible, but he didn't find a fillable thing, and yesterday's ache was all put on. I do hope Granny will understand."

I hoped so, too, though neither of us could tell. It was just the sort of a day to get acquainted with new cousins, and to have to spend part of it in that Chamber of Tortures seemed a dreadful waste of golden minutes. I looked out at Jack and Gilbert turning somersaults on the lawn, with the dogs barking and circling around them, and a feeling of sadness and longness crept over me—as the verse says. I can do those stunts rather well myself, and when the other fellows were showing off it was hard not to take part, too. Judy's eyes followed mine. She doesn't care much for those things, because she doesn't do them herself, and she often calls them "silly" with her nose in the air. When girls want to make out they're superior, they always say things are "silly." Not that anyone minds! Now, no matter what Judy thought of acrobatics, she knew my

opinion on the subject and she knew, too, what was taking place within me, though I kept still. For two good minutes she was quiet as we stood watching those careless, happy-hearted boys at play.

"Jack beats Gilbert all to pieces," she said at last, "but I don't believe he can do those lovely wheel-things that you do. Go and show him."

I went. You can just bet I didn't wait to be told twice; why, you couldn't have seen my heels for dust. And I lighted right down on those fellows and set them and the dogs scattering; then I started in to show them some things that were really worth while. When I'd done a few I looked back at the window to see what Judy thought of her twin, but there wasn't a trace of her anywhere. In a flash it came over me that she'd sent me off, as a ruche, so she could go alone to Granny and take all the blame herself. She meant that I should get off scot-free, if she could manage it.

"Let's go down Green Brook Road," Gilbert suggested.

"I can't," I exclaimed with decision, "I've a date with Granny, but you others trot where

you like." And without waiting any longer I bolted back to the house.

"Get some cash for it," Gilbert shouted unfeelingly after me, "and treat us to something or other; our funds are beastly low."

I didn't answer him—I meant to some other time—but ran around to the Blue room and scuttled across the veranda to the window. As I went panting up the sound of Judy's voice came out to me; of course, she'd reached there long before. I stood listening for a minute, looking in unseen. Granny was standing in the centre of the room, and Judy was in front of her, while a little further off Uncle Tom was sitting astride a chair completely hidden in the paper and paying no attention to what was going on, though perhaps he did but feign that out of considerateness. Cousin Laura hadn't yet come down, which might not be a good thing for Granny's firmness, though it was much better for our weakness.

"And so there was no reason," I heard Granny say. "Is that what you wish me to believe?"

"No ache reason," Judy answered softly, "but there was the other that I told you of,

and, of course, the wad reason to make the cheek look the way it did."

"You think Dr. Perry won't be able to discover one?" Granny asked.

"Oh! I'm very sure he won't," Judy cried quickly, "and I should hate to have him try. But if you're going to be firm, please only be firm about me. Please don't have Phil go to Dr. Perry, his teeth are as sound and unaching as any that ever were made, and it was all my plan."

Then I bounced into the room; I couldn't stay outside an instant longer.

"If Judy goes, I go too," I announced resolutely, "though it was only a make-believe. My face was as swollen as hers."

"Quite as badly swollen," Uncle Tom murmured as if he were reading aloud, "I remember marvelling at your cheek." Then he put down the paper with a great crackling and got up.

"Come, Mother," he said, "let not these suppliants sue in vain. Be merciful to them. Don't you think you've had punishment enough, little maid?"

"Of course I do," Judy replied promptly,

"but perhaps Granny's thinker and mine don't agree. It's been such a many-sided punishment —though the worst thing about it was the dentist torment hanging over our heads; giving up the cake was nothing to it, bad as that was—I mean bad as the giving-up was. And before, there was the uncomfortableness inside and out, especially out. Hannah would put a mustard leaf on my cheek, though I got it off as soon as I could, but not before it raised a blister. Look here. And Phil wore a piping hot potato."

"Great Scot!" Uncle Tom cried. "Surely, Mother, you haven't the heart now to pile Ossa upon Pelion."

Granny looked at him and laughed, and though we didn't understand his gibberish we saw, when she turned our way, that there was to be no further piling of anything upon our devoted heads. Ossa and Pelion, whatever they might be, were to be saved for another day. She just stretched out her arms, and Judy and I were in their clasp in a second. When she isn't firm there isn't a grandmother who can beat her anywhere!

Presently she let us go, after half smother-

ing us—though we didn't object to that, I can tell you—and Uncle Tom offered me his hand. I shook it heartily—he seemed a nice sort! But Judy—kissed him. Which shows that girls will say one thing, and do another—even the best of them. As we stood there in peace and amicableness the sound of someone, with rustling skirts, coming toward the room was distinctly heard. We listened a second to make sure; then we waited no longer, but dashed away to fun and freedom on the Green Brook Road.

# CHAPTER VI

## THE S. P. O. D.

"LET's make ourselves into a club," Judy cried. "Don't you think that would be nice?"

We thought it would—and said so—though I guess any suggestion would have seemed good to us just then, for time hung heavy on our hands. We were tired out besides, from a long walk in the sun, and were resting on the lawn under a big elm, which we called the Council Tree, a short distance from the house. Larry and Crumb were outstretched on the grass near us, taking forty winks, but Shadow kept walking over our persons as if we were avenues made to be strolled upon, while Liberty tagged after—both of them only too ready to start on another jaunt if we saw it in the same light. The week that had gone by since the arrival of the Reformers had been a pretty crowded one, and jolly, too. Though Jack and Sheila had visited Granny much oftener than

we had (this was only our second visit), we found we could open their eyes to many things. And we did! But at last we had come to the end and we were feeling uncommonly low in our minds, not knowing what to do next, so Judy's idea put new life into us.

Jack rolled over on his stomach kicking his heels in air; some of it was delight, and some of it was to keep Liberty at a distance.

"Bully for you, Judy," he cried, "I'll be part of your club, unless it's for tramps—and then I draw the line."

"So do I," Gilbert chimed in, "though I'd rather have it for the feet than for the hands. There was a boy visiting at our Post once—Phil, you remember that pie-faced jay, Franky Grant, don't you?—and he told me he belonged to the "Helping Hands," but he was going to resign. His aunt kept him busy hunting for her knitting balls, and he had to pretend he liked it——"

"Golf balls are much more unfindable," Margery said, casting a meaning glance at Gilbert through her curls, "and people who aren't Helping Handers have to hunt for them. It's no fun, especially if Shadow finds

the ball first, and you have to give chase. I won't join that sort of thing."

"We might have it a sewing club, and make heathenish clothes for the missionaries," Sheila suggested.

"Oh, bosh!" I cut in. "You seem to forget that ours is a mixed society, and we fellows don't sew, and what's more I shouldn't think any sensible person would——"

"Hannah says——" began Margery.

The words were frozen on her lips by a look from a certain pair of eyes. Hannah is all well enough in her way and, when that way doesn't clash with ours, it is not an unnice one, really. We even like her then. She used to be nurse to Mother, and our uncles, so, of course, remembering that, we feel more kindly toward her, and are willing to bear with the aged. But that is no reason why her say-sos should be dragged into our hours of ease

"There's one thing certain," I announced in savage tones, "we won't have any Hannahisms in this club. That must be understood from the start. And any person found guilty of using them must clear out."

"I don't care," Margery answered crossly,

she'd got herself together and her temper is often prickly. "Hannah says everyone should know how to sew, for even the tighest buttons and strings come off something dreadful—and then, what are you going to do without them? You can't place no dependence on pins, Hannah says, especially if you're given to sneezing. Hannah thinks——"

"Oh! please shut up, Margery," Judy interfered pleadingly. "It's too warm for such talk. Of course, Hannah is right, but she only meant it for us—that's our fate. The boys will always have someone to tend to their buttons. We couldn't have a sewing club with them in it, even if we showed them how; I'd hate to see them sticking a needle in and out of a piece of cloth, and getting hot and mad over twisting threads."

"We might have a society for us three then," Sheila cried, clinging to her idea; she was as bad as Shadow about giving up things. "We could call it the Cheerful Workers, and sew for the poor."

"Cheerful nothings," Jack sniffed. "If you go on like that I'm off" (and his legs looked distinctly as if they meant to get up). "No

working club for me, thank you! Dad belongs to lots of clubs, but he never does a single thing in any of them. I've passed the club houses often, and the members just sit in the windows staring out and talking——"

"What do they talk about?" Gilbert demanded.

"I've never been near enough to hear," Jack replied, "but I've heard Dad and his friends go on at our house, so I suppose it's the same everywhere. They talk of boats, and stock-yards, and 'lectioneering; then they spin stories——"

"I should like that," I put in, "if the stories were good."

"I guess they generally are," Jack returned thoughtfully. "I know Dad and Uncle Tom often say they've heard a good thing at the club. We might try our hands at something of the sort.

"Dear me!" Sheila cried. "I don't see why we should bother to make ourselves into a club just to do that. Sewing is far sensibler."

"We might be an improving society and each write something and read it out to the others," Judy said quickly. "Don't you re-

member Granny's club that met here just after we came?"

"I remember it was most dreadfully stupid," Margery yawned, "and you said so then, we got so tired peeking. The tea and the dear little cakes afterwards were the best part, and I guess all those improving ladies thought so, too."

"Write something," Gilbert bellowed angrily. "Huh! what a club for pleasure. We might as well be going to school, and that time will be here before we know it. If you can't suggest anything livelier, Judy Egerton, you'd better shut up. I should think you'd see that what we want is to get away from dulness."

I sat up suddenly and let Gilbert have a sounding whack between the shoulders and, though it took him so unawares that he almost toppled over, as soon as he straightened himself and started to shoot out his fist, he saw that the blow wasn't one of the returnable kind, and his hand fell open at his side.

"Bully for you, old man," I shouted, "you've hit the nail on the head. We want to steer clear of slow affairs and have a rousing good time; we'll have to grind soon enough.

I move that we get up a club to keep things humming——"

"How?" asked Sheila, who was often practicable. She was the only one of the crowd who hadn't shouted in joyous accordance; even the dogs had joined the din.

"Oh! bother," I cried a bit crossly, for no one likes to be brought up short. "You can't say beforehand 'how,' because it mostly depends on what you set out to do. But whatever it is, you can bet it won't be making togs for the heathen, or trotting around from door to door leaving tracks to reform people. It's pure, undilutable fun we're after, and—I tell you—folks will see some pretty tall humming."

"We might call ourselves 'The Hummers,'" Gilbert put in, with a smirk that said as plain as print that he could furnish ideas as fast as they were wanted.

"Ah! not that," Judy protested. "Somehow it makes me think of the little busy bees, and you boys didn't want to be cheerful workers, but that's just what they are."

"True enough," Gilbert agreed gloomily, "odious little bumbling things, always setting you a beastly example. Still," he went on, the

smirk coming back to his classic features, "there are hummers and HUMMERS!"

"Of course there are," Judy owned up, she's always so nice about seeing the other side, "and if you all want to, we'll be Hummers—only I think it would be more grown-up if we were the Suppression of something, or the Relief Clubbers——"

"Or the Preventables," chimed in Jack, "like the 'S. P. C. A.'—the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, you know—I say, what's to pay?"

For Judy was on her feet hopping wildly around as if one of the hummers—and not the kind Gilbert had meant—had found her out, and the dogs, as if they, too, had been stung to action, were bounding about her, making such a row that just at first we couldn't hear ourselves think. In a jiffy we saw that there was no pain on her brow, or anywhere else.

"Down, Larry," she cried above the uproar, "shut up, Crumb, somebody catch Liberty. Oh! do everybody stop barking, and hurrah for Jack, he's given us our name."

"What is it?" asked Jack, staring at her bewilderedly, while we put the same question,

and Shadow, who was always uncatchable, echoed it from a safe distance.

"Why, the Society for the Prevention of Dulness," she answered. "The S. P. O. D. Isn't it perfectly grand?"

We caught on like a house on fire, and for a few minutes it sounded as if a circus were passing. Jack shouted as loud as the rest of us for, as he afterwards explained (and he was ever a truthful boy), he remembered that Judy had suggested the club in the first place, and the dulness had come from Gilbert, so he wasn't shouting for himself at all, because he'd only put the two things together, though he was glad we liked it. Liked it? Well, ra-a-ther. It couldn't be beat.

When quiet was restored, we went on talking about the Club and its officers; there were positions enough to go around so that matter was discussed with calm sereneness. Then Margery, in accordance with the unwritten law in every well-brought-up family, was sent to the house to fetch a copy-book. She looked rank mutiny, though she didn't dare to argue, and before we knew what was going to happen Judy up and promised her that nothing

should be said about the S. P. O. D. while she was gone, if she'd hurry. That was hard on us; still Judy had given her word and, as things turned out, we didn't have to keep silent long, for the messenger was back in double-quick time. She was puffing like a steam-drill, and, of course, she'd brought the wrong book—that's Margery all over! I was for ordering her back, but Judy said we couldn't waste any more precious moments, the Club must be put down in black and white right away. Whereupon, as had been agreed, she started in to write the account.

It was an agitating moment. We pressed close about her, dogs and all, while Shadow, the moment that he saw she was busy, had to coil himself up in her lap. She didn't pack him off, because his back makes a fine table, though just as she started in to write he wobbled, and the letters looked like a six-year-old's. It was impossible to expect any club to start with such a shaky beginning, but no one had thought to tell Margery to bring a rubber, and we generously refrained from making her trot again; she was still breathing actively, though (and in this I may wrong the child) I think much of

it was put on. So I dropped a promiscuous hint, but Sheila and Gilbert, who were the other sendable ones, pretended not to hear. Then Jack held Shadow steady by main force and Judy, looking very red and hot, set to work on a fresh page. And this is what she wrote:

I

The name of this Club is—
The Society for the Prevention of Dulness.

II

The Officers of it, are the following:

President—Philip Egerton.

Vice—John Brayton Ronalds.

Secretary—Judith Egerton.

Treasurer (only there's nothing to treasure)—Gilbert Hale Egerton.

Talking Delegate—Sheila Janet Ronalds.

Walking Delegate—Margery Ronalds Egerton.

III

The Object of this Club is:
To Keep Dulness from flapping its wings
above our heads.

Judy paused, with her pencil raised and a frown between her eyebrows.

"We must have a motto," she said positively, "and I truly think it ought to be in Latin."

Gilbert groaned; he also kicked—which wasn't at all the thing for a Treasurer to do.

"But we ain't Improvers," he grumbled. "I thought you knew that we were just going in for fun, and, besides, unless it was in Dog-Latin, Sheila and Margery wouldn't understand. And anyway, I don't believe the rest of you could spell the first thing without a book, so that puts an end to the club. I don't see why we should have a motto."

"Please don't be disagreeable, Gilbert," Judy cried. "All clubs have them, I'm sure."

"Well," I interfered, "the only way to prevent dulness is to play some prank—anyone can see that. So we might take for our motto, 'No day without its prank.'"

That sounded like something I'd heard before, but I wasn't certain. It expressed my meaning at any rate, and it was easier to understand than Latin, besides being more spellable, for I rather shared Gilbert's opinion, only it would never have done for me, in my

position, to side with him. Judy's brow cleared, and the others looked pleasanter right away, especially the Delegates—who'd been shooting angry glances at the Treasurer, which he treated with lofty scorn.

"'No day without its prank!' Oh! I say, that's a corker," Jack cried, turning a somersault and coming up grinning the next moment. "Have you written it down, Secretary?" he demanded in a Vice-Presidential voice, though he ought to have left the question to his superior.

"Not yet, I was making it into poetry," Judy answered, "like this:

A prank every day
Keeps Dulness away.

Isn't that more the thing?"

"You bet," Jack giggled, before I could speak. "It makes me think of the Village Blacksmith:

Each morning sees some Prank begun,
Each evening sees its close.

Hurrah for Judy!"

"Order! Order!" I commanded above the

uproar. "This is a business meeting, not a yelling one. Keep quiet and sit still, every-one of you, or there will be consequences. That's it—now you look ever so much more clubbable. As President of this honor-able society I'm glad to say that it's been mag-nanimously agreed to adopt Miss Judy Eger-ton's motto for three reasons. First, because it is in our mother's tongue. Second, because it sinks unforgettably into the humane mind. Third—and lastly—because it puts every-thing in a nutshell. I hope the words will penetrate the thick walls of every preventing heart here present, whispering to each of us to go forth and do our best to drive dulness from the land of our birth. And now, fellow members, you can all get up and raise the roof."

When we couldn't shout any more we sank down again on the ground, rather weak in our lungs, and wondering aloud how we should begin our careers of Preventers, but before we could decide on anything we were called to dinner. It was borne in upon us then, for somehow, we hadn't thought of it earlier, that our Society would have to be a secret one.

It would never do for the grown-ups to suspect aught of what was in our young and soaring minds, or they might turn Preventers themselves—the other kind! Only too truly we felt that our plans must be made on the sly, and the mere thought of them, wrapped in mist though they were, sent our brave red blood tingling more quickly through our veins.

We couldn't wait to talk over matters further, for Sophy was making frantic signals from the window and, if we loitered, she might start off any moment to tell Granny (hers is an informing disposition) and then the dinner would be shorn of its dessert. Such curtailings had happened before, and would again—there's nothing new in the way of punishments! So we didn't delay, but in the short time it took to cross the lawn we determined that we must have some countersign. Judy wanted "Remember" (Charles the First's "Remember," and you can make it so thrilling and ghastly!) but it is often a dead give-away, so we sent it packing on the instant. Jack and Gilbert, who were sore tempted by hunger to increase their speed unbecomingly, thought any old thing ought to do; one was for "Gin-

ger," and the other for "Buttons," while Sheila giggled provokingly and declared "Beans" sounded far nicer.

It really was too bad! To get so far, to make up a fine, full-fledged society and arrange about the officers, and the motto, and everything, only at the last to be stumped by a measly little pass-word. No wonder we all felt as solemn as owls. We knew that unless we made up our minds in a hurry we'd have to wait until after dinner was over, for with Sophy passing in and out of the room we'd have to be pretty careful on account of the nature Heaven had given her (that's what she says, for everyone puts the blame on someone else). I didn't feel, as President of the S. P. O. D., that I ought to suggest the countersign, still the others looked so dreadfully stupid, there was little to be expected from them. And we were almost at the house. Somehow, I wished I hadn't squelched Judy's "Remember"—it really wasn't half bad, and she did so like it. I glanced at her to see if she was minding, but her face showed no backward regrets; it was all screwed up as if she was trying to think of something new. I was

sure she felt with me that we would have to be quick, and I knew she thought, as I did—that there was too much talk about discussions to make them altogether pleasant; so we wanted to get that part of the business over as soon as possible.

Then Margery came to the rescue. The only thing she'd done had been to run for the copy-book (which didn't count, for she would have had to go on errands, club or no club), and just as she reached the breakfast room window she turned and faced us all, saying, with her finger up to her lips, and her eyes as round as saucers:

"Mum's the word!"

And "Mum" it was.

# CHAPTER VII

## THE MEANING OF A PRANK

JUDY'S next secretarial act was to make a list of those ordinary pranks which will unbidden rise in every pranker's breast. It seemed a waste of paper, because we knew them only too well, but she said the human memory plays a person dreadfully false when it's most wanted, so that quite common, every-day facts run away like water down a hill, leaving the mind as dry as punk. Perhaps she was right. At any rate, she'd gone to the trouble of copying the things down in our log-book, and there they would have to stay. We were all under the Council Tree the morning after the club was formed and she showed us the record, with pride mantling her blushing maiden's cheek, as it says in the story, and her voice shook a little when she read it out. It went like this:

FOR THE PRANKER IN TIME OF NEED

Apple-pie bed.

Brushes, boots, or anything handyable, put between the sheets.

Chairs pulled suddenly from about-to-sit-downers (*not* to be tried on the Aged).

Door mats secreted (one on the servants!).

Elevating objects.

Fastening something to coat, or skirt, unrecked by the wearer.

Ghosts: gliding and gibbering.

Hooking things from the pantry.

Ice dropped between skin and collar of unauspicious person.

Jollying somebody with a straight face.

King and Queen.

Lurking in dark passages (you know why).

Milk sweetened or soured.

Nots so fixed that packages part asunder.

Openings made for the youth of all nations.

Persons sent on fool errands (have a care!).

Ringing bells and running off (another on the servants).

Salt put in place of sugar.

Twitchable parcels laid in the path of the unwary.

Uniting persons, unnoticed by them.

Visitors entertained.

Watery showers from clear skies.

Xchanging hats, or other articles.

THE END

We fellows sniggered at each familiar friend, while the two Delegates giggled and nodded until their heads nearly dropped off.

All this pleased Judy immensely and quite made up to her for the time she'd spent getting the deeds in alphabetical order. Anybody else would have written them in a slap-dash fashion, but she isn't that sort; she's always willing to take extra pains. Of course, we thought of other pranks right away, for her list was like a little nudge to the elbows of our minds. Yet it was far from an easy matter to decide upon the first public act of the S. P. O. D. We'd determined from the start to do no deed that should cause a blot of shame to submerge the Society's fair brow, and we couldn't play pranks on any of the members. But that didn't dishearten the band. There was still the outside world—Uplands and its inhabitants, and all who came within the gates. Our hands would be full!

Granny's name stood at the top of the page, though Judy would put M. P. after it, which—she explained—meant "mild prank." It was the only saving clause, so we let it stand. The second name was greeted with prolonged howls, and immediately Gilbert offered to catch any number of beetles to be let loose upon occasions. With a haste that was truth-

fully unbecoming, Judy overruled the suggestion, even as it emerged from her brother's lips, and Sheila and Margery piped in quickly. When it comes to crawlers girls always flock together. Judy declared beetles were low, and would bring a shade to the Society's fair brow (it wasn't the Society's brow Gilbert had had in mind), and she went on to say that it meant death to the beetles—which was cruel. This was fine in Judy, you may think, but it didn't take us in. She's always objected to beetles, and she knew that it wouldn't only be the second person on the list who would feel them on her back, or her brow, or watch them meandering over her skirts. Beetles do not stay long in one place—and, while it sounded very noble to talk about the cruel pangs of the downtrodden ones, we knew *she* wouldn't shed many tears if the whole tribe of 'em was swept from the face of the earth. But she came down so flat-footed that we had to rule out the beetles. If half of a club thinks an action low and keeps dinning about it, the other half has to give in—or there will be a dandy row.

Judy suggested a lot of things to do to

the second person, though she might just as well have written "M. P." down again, for all the fun there was in any of them. Gilbert had been willing to go to a lot of trouble about the beetles—and he is far from a grubbing boy—but when his plan was treated with scorn he retired into himself and sat apart, looking crosser than a bear with an old sore head. Judy pretended to be blind to this, and kept asking his opinion in the politest tones. It was no go, however, he wouldn't come round. He just grunted out that she seemed to be running the whole show and, if Sunday-school pranks were to be the order for the other lady-like members, he'd nothing to say. I felt my blood boil at his sarcasticalness, and Jack was ready to fly out, though we held our tongues for fear of a scrap, but he finally ended in making Judy mad, and I don't know how matters would have turned out if Sheila hadn't been blessed with an idea.

It wasn't much of a one, still we pounced on it gratefully on account of the chasm it bridged. She proposed that we'd buy some sleigh-bells, or the little jingly ones the baby kids have on their toys, and fasten them on

Cousin Laura's gowns. The three girl Preventers would see to the simple business of sewing them on, and then we'd all come in for the fun.

"'She shall have music wherever she goes,'" giggled Margery, catching on at once. "Oh! you wait and hear. She won't be able to tell where it comes from, she'll think it's one of the cats, and you know how she just *hates* cats —and the more she bustles around the louder the bells will tinkle. Sheila darling, it's the very scrumptiousest plan."

Sheila tossed her head and looked awfully high-and-mighty, though she needn't have put on any airs, because the idea was on Judy's list all along. There are different kinds of scrumptiousness, too, and while I'd have chosen another word for such a tame little affair if I'd been allowed to speak first, still the longer I thought of it the better I was pleased. The others hailed it with roars of delight, and Gilbert came right out of the dumps. We knew Cousin Laura was far from deaf, and though a bell is never as scattering as a beetle, yet it will keep most people pretty wide awake. And another thing in its favor was the fact that

there'd be small danger of our being surprised by the enemy with that ringing and chinging in the air. Our club atmosphere cleared instanter, and we went on planning with bounding pulses; though we soon discovered that we were as far from settling on the big thing as at first. Farther. And to make matters ten times worse, Judy, who'd been in a brown study for some minutes, shied a bomb into our midst by asking what a prank really was. That was a corker. Then she went on to say that we all seemed to think that it meant just playing tricks on trusting people, when it really might mean any sort of fun, and she thought we ought to look it up in the Dic. before deciding on our plans.

We stared at her, having no answer ready. As if it wasn't enough fun to make game of the grown-ups without bothering us with such questions as if she was a school-marm! But I suppose the beetles had wakened her wondering parts and made her want to stay our hands. That's the trouble with girls, they aren't practicable jokers; they're always remembering a thing has two sides—which is hampering. I saw that I'd have to take a stand and be done

with it, so I determined to find out the meaning of the word myself and waste no more precious time. Of course, it wasn't *my* place to run errands, still I couldn't stop to think of that.

I made for the house, but luck was against me. Granny and Uncle Tom were in the library and I didn't see them until it was too late to beat a retreat. There was nothing for me to do then but to deport myself like a man —and a President—so I drew myself up to my fullest height and told Granny I'd like to consult the Dic. if she'd no objections. She nodded pleasantly and went on with her reading as if there was nothing out of the way in what I'd said, though Uncle Tom seemed to think it no end funny. He laughed in a fashion that made me resolve interiorly that he shouldn't escape the S. P. O. D. if my voice had aught of weight; moreover, no matter what the book had to say on the subject, I'd treat him to the kind of pranks I already knew.

"Come your ways, imbiber of knowledge," he cried with a smirk, "enter and quench your thirst at the well of English undefiled."

I held my tongue and bent over the Dic. on its big stand. I soon found what I wanted, though with Uncle Tom firing a lot of officious questions at my head, I didn't dare to trust to my memory, so I took a pencil and a bit of paper from my pocket and scratched down the different meanings as fast as I could. Seeing the seriousness on my brow he stopped jollying me and stood leaning against the mantel, his eyes fixed on my face; somehow, I felt he could even see what I was writing, though the width of the room was between us. Presently he said very slowly:

"I'll wager anything you like that that boy is after a prank."

I jumped as if I'd been shot, and in a flash my hand flew to the top of the page, then it quickly fell to my side and I squnched back in a heap; I'd tumbled into his trap and no mistake. As soon as I could, I pulled myself together. I saw he hadn't proved the first thing; he'd only hit on the word by blind accidentalness. Still, it left me shivery, not knowing what he'd light on next, and I was glad enough that none of the others had come in my stead. It would have gone ill with our club if that

had been the case. I didn't wait for further parleying, but rammed the paper in my pocket, banged to the Dic. and took a header through the window. It wasn't a dignified proceeding, though it was safe; he might think what he chose, his thoughts would tell him nothing. I kept up a pretty stiff pace back to the Council Tree, and yet rumblings of reproach greeted me from afar.

"Granny and Uncle Tom were in the library," I said and, though I was awfully blown, I put a world of meaning into my voice.

Instantly the clouds rolled from the brows before me.

"How did you manage?" the Society gasped in one breath.

"I managed," I answered, wagging my head with my tongue in my cheek. "I MANAGED. Trust your President. Here's what I wrote down under their very eyes."

I put my hand into my pocket and drew it out—empty. I put it into the other pocket —into every other pocket in my trousers, and in my jacket as well, and each time out it came empty, except for the things a boy gen-

erally keeps stowed away for convenience sake, and which didn't count—that wad of paper wasn't with them. I even went so far as to turn the inside outside; but it was all in vain. I stared helplessly at my brother and sister Preventers, and they stared back—you know how!—with open mouths, and eyes that said plainer than plain, "Now, you've gone and done it!" But no one uttered a word. Then I sat down—somehow.

At once Liberty, as if he knew what a hole I was in, came up and licked my face, and Shadow came likewise—also Larry, and Crumb. They understood, quicker than flesh and blood mortals, the deepness of my feelings. Dogs are always like that—the most comforting comforters to be found anywhere! You'd have thought such an example would be swiftly followed by humane nature, wouldn't you? It was Not. The expressive silence lasted for some minutes; then the whole club rose and howled at me like a Roman populace—and worse. They forgot that I was their President and called me "a duffer" (this from the boys), while the girls cried "Blunderbluss," and "Stupid," with sniffs that meant unsay-

able things; even Judy knew no mercy, though she was the first to soften.

"How ever did you lose it?" she asked, and she honestly tried to make her voice unfile-like.

"I suppose it just fell out," I mumbled, "I was in such a hurry."

"'Haste is of the devil,'" Jack put in, as if he were a hundred in the shade. Sometimes his head is really too full of copy-book wisdom and tags of verses for anyone to stand. I let him see how I felt on that score by a look.

"Well, I had to get back," I growled, "you couldn't do the first thing without me—I should think you'd see that without jumping on a fellow as if you were all centipedes and didn't know what else to do with your feet. Besides, I'd another reason."

Then I told them how awfully near Uncle Tom had come to finding out what I was up to. I had meant to have the secret buried with me, but it seemed best that they should hear it, and it did change things a lot. They saw at once that I simply had to take the wings of the morning, no matter if haste did belong to the person Jack had spoken of. They all agreed to that; still, we couldn't help feeling

that matters were as black as a pocket. I was for resigning my office as the least I could do for getting them in such a fix, but they raised the dandiest row and Judy was almost in tears at the mere idea. She pointed out (and it was true, too!) that it really was all her fault, as she'd been the only one unsatisfied with what we knew about pranks, and she volunteered to hunt for the lost paper herself. There was just a chance that Uncle Tom hadn't seen it, and she might find it before he, or any of the other grown-ups, did.

The moment she was on her feet, Jack was up, too, and it didn't take the Delegates long to follow his example, only I beat them at it, you'd better believe. Gilbert, however, didn't seem to be in any hurry; he just stretched himself, as cool as you please, and looked off at the sunny lawn with half-shut eyes; but before I could let him feel a brotherly poke he joined us of his own accord. He'd evidently been thinking things out, for he said, in a-not-afraid-of-the-whole-bunch-of-you voice, that we were being all the Clubs we'd talked of—Helping Hands, Willing Feet, Cheerful Workers, Plain Improvers, every single one of 'em but

Preventers of Dulness, and he hoped we'd take a vow, whether the paper was found, or not, to talk less and act more. There was common sense in his remarks, and we cried, "Ay, ay," in a loud chorus as we formed ourselves into a band.

Now, I'd traveled a straight course from the house to the Council Tree, and the way was as plain as the nose on Danby's face (and there isn't anything plainer in the universe, Cook says). It was Judy's plan for Jack to interview Uncle Tom—the boy can look as solemn as an owl, and keep his real feelings hidden all the time. She would search the library herself with a careless, unparticular sort of air, Gilbert was to do the same just outside the window, and I was also in charge of that part of the terrace; while the Delegates were to measure every single inch of the lawn as if they were hunting for lucky clovers. There had been a baby breeze stirring all morning, and the paper might have been blown to one side or the other, so they were bound to look well, and on all-fours, if need be. We made that specially clear to them. When all was arranged, we started on our way and the dogs

immediately fell into line. Liberty, in particular, was so overjoyed at the prospect of a walk that he nipped Shadow's leg, daring him to come on—at which, Shadow turned to let him have it for being so fresh. We stood still and watched them as they tore over the grass, and, though we were feeling most awfully low in our minds, we whistled and yelled to keep the sport going, while we held the two other dogs tight. Just as it was all up with the youngster, Shadow paused for the wee-est part of a second, and the next we knew he was running for all he was worth, with his head high, and his jaws close shut, and the puppy —his slobbery pink tongue dangling out a yard—was fairly tumbling over himself as he gave chase.

Round and round they flew in ever nearer circles, and suddenly Gilbert, with a quick cry of "Oh! I say," fell upon Shadow and dragged him down. A howl went up from us as from a furious giant's throat. If there's one thing that's unfair, it's interfering in another fellow's game, and for an outsider to trip up a boy, or a dog, when he's doing his level best, is, of all meannesses, the meanest. Gilbert had been

HE JUMPED UP WAVING SOMETHING IN HIS HAND

cheering on Liberty from the start, and anyone could see, with half an eye, that he wanted him to win; but that was no reason why he couldn't let the dogs work out the matter themselves, without taking such a low-down advantage with his superior unblownness. I felt a blush of shame mantle my brow that a brother of mine should be guilty of such conduct, and I meant to have it out with him then and there—with fists, or feet, I didn't know which. I was mad. I sprang to the attack, but Jack was before me. Gilbert saw us coming from his stooping position over Shadow and yelled to us to keep back.

"Two of you at once on one chap," he roared. "That's fine, ain't it? That's corking brave. You great ninnies, can't you see what I'm after? Do you think this dog has nothing but his tongue in his mouth? There, look! Who's the only fellow with any sense in his head?"

He jumped up waving something in his hand, and held it out to me, while Shadow made frantic leaps in the air.

"Is this yours?" he demanded in a lordly voice.

I took it from him without speaking. It was mostly shreds, but if a boy and a dog tug at the same object such a state isn't to be wondered at. Wet and grimy though the thing was, the fact remained that it had once been paper. After a moment I was even able to make out some words in my own writing—grown very faint. A tremendous cheer worked its way to my lips and burst upon the listening air as I clapped Gilbert on the shoulder.

"Bully for you, Sherlock Holmes," I cried, "you've saved us! Friends, and fellow-preventibles, lend me your ears. This battered, tattered, spattered thing is the long-lost document. Our weary search is o'er, and we can breathe in peace again, thanks to our noble, far-seeing brother, and thanks, as well, to Shadow—our trusty friend and comrade dear. Here, old chap, I give you back this vile paper, do with it as you will. That's it! r-r-rend it to atoms. We are saved. And now," I went on, when I could make myself heard, "anybody wanting to look in the Dic. may do so at his—or her (and especially her) peril. The Society won't suffer for it. But I warn that person—him or her—to wait till the coast is clear and even then to trust to memory, however bad,

paper is too risky. Another time a brilliant brother mightn't be able to rush to the rescue. And I want to say right here to any squeamish holder-back, that a prank isn't wicked. Far otherwise. It's a gay, and sporty deed, a simple trick, a mischievous act—I remember that last because of never being sure—like others I could name—about spelling mischievous, whether the 'e' or 'i' comes first—though a little thing like that doesn't bother me long. What concerns us most is, that we can just pitch in and root up dulness from the land."

Judy stood out from the others; her face very set and purposeful.

"We'll begin with Uncle Tom," she declared darkly, her manner saying plainly that our late scare must be revenged.

"No so fast, my child, not so fast," I answered. "Uncle Tom shan't escape us—don't you fear—but we'll have to lie low for a couple of days; he'll be on guard at first. I saw that in his eyes."

"The bells," put in Sheila.

"Bells it is," I returned. "I move we all go down to the little Odds and Ends shop and lay in a stock."

# CHAPTER VIII

## FOR LOVE'S SAKE

THE beginnings of nations are always humble, say the history-books, and that is also the way with the beginnings of many other things, but most especially of clubs. Jack said nobody ought to be cast down about it, for he'd no doubt the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Society itself was long in starting. And when it did get a move on, it was with some simple act of brotherly love like the unchecking of a horse, or the dismembering of a tin can from a dog's tail. And very probably the President had his hands full, too, trying to keep up the spirits of his followers, and he had to tell them over and over that if they'd only wait a little in peace and patience they would soon have all the business they could attend to.

I didn't need any points from Jack, I can tell you, for I knew how to run things myself, only when you've got grumblings to deal with, it's good to have someone on your side. Any-

way, he was a Vice, so it really wasn't like interfering. Well, if it hadn't been that we were just on fire with thoughts of the great deeds in the matter of preventing dulness that we meant to do some time, those first days would have been hard to live through; they were so dreadfully tame. It seemed as if everything was against us. The bells, in particular, gave us no end of trouble. As if it wasn't enough that to get a measly handful (the shopman hadn't but a dozen) we had to tramp more than a mile to the shop and back again in the blazing sunshine, we were late for dinner, into the bargain, with the usual consequences. You'd have thought that after that everything would be as smiling as a path of roses, wouldn't you? It was not. The worst was still to come!

Girls are dreadfully cautious by nature. They won't take the least risk, but will squeak and run back a dozen times before they end up by doing a single thing. We fellows knew this all too well and we were willing to make allowances. Judy and the Delegates had only been commanded to do a little trumpery sewing, for, of course, that was more in their

line than ours—it being sort of born in them, as you might say. We volunteered to keep the coast clear as long as possible, so it should be easy sailing for them, which—as anyone can see—was where the real work came in.

As soon as dinner was over we boys trooped around to the side veranda where the grown-ups were sitting. They had just come from their own luncheon and seemed at peace with all the world. They were also transparently glad to see us, and we pretended we were having the time of our lives. Jack, with the biggest part of the undertaking on his manly shoulders, asked Cousin Laura to play Hoppity, and when she beamed all over and said she'd be "de-lighted to!" he got out the board, like the hero he was. She never tackles the game lightly—not she!—she puts her whole mind to it. Why, it's like starting a steamer to get her to move a piece—she thinks so long. Jack had been there before, so he went into the thing with his eyes open, but it was to help on the Cause. I sat waiting at one side while Uncle Tom opened up his chaff on me, and Granny—suddenly remembering some wool she wanted to wind—found employment

for Gilbert's idle hands. We were victims, but our spirits were kept from fainting by the thought of what was being done afar off in Cousin Laura's closet.

That thought came banging down to earth at the end of half an hour, with the appearance of the Walking Delegate, who took up her stand behind Uncle Tom's chair, where I had a full view of her distorting countenance—and so had Cousin Laura. Not that she paid any attention to it at first, being far too busy studying moves, but the awful scowls and mouthings must have got on her nerves, for presently she cried sharply:

"If you've anything to say, child, say it at once and stop that hideous dumb show. Why do you make such grimaces?"

Margery turned redder—I didn't suppose that was possible—and almost tumbled over with fright, then she straightened herself and spluttered out:

"Because Phil's so dreadfully stupid."

Here was a pretty kettle of fish, as Cook says. Everyone glanced around, first at her, and then at me—and more at me—while Uncle Tom shouted with a laugh:

"Just what I thought myself, only I was too polite to say it."

Now, the worst of being called stupid is that it's apt to make you so, all in a minute. I knew, of course, by Margery's signals, that something was in the wind, but I couldn't tell what it was, and I had to sit still and keep down my feelings because I couldn't have it out with her on the spot. She took a mean advantage of this state of affairs and went boldly to Uncle Tom's side, leaning against him and grinning at the way he tried to roast me. I treated them both to some pretty black looks which did but increase their silliness. It wasn't particularly lively just then; a deep shade of gloom was on Gilbert's brow, despite his smirking lips, and the company smile on Jack's face was not implanted there by Enjoyment. Presently the Talking Delegate came ambling out on the veranda quite mute, but if she'd worn sandwich-boards things couldn't have been plainer. "No Go!" was written all over her from head to foot. Even the blindest of grown-ups must have seen that.

There was no escape for us. We couldn't —wouldn't desert Jack. It was as if he was

glued to his chair, while Cousin Laura—embarked upon a wild career of Hoppity—went from one game to another, as though she meant to play unto seventy times seven. Gilbert, his labors o'er, sank on the settee in a heap and almost directly forgot our troubles in sleep, and Granny dropped off, too, behind her book, only not so loudly. So the minutes crawled away.

At half-past four Cousin Laura pushed the Halma board from her and got up stiffly. She was cramped and tired from long sitting, though otherwise in high good-humor, and affectionate to the point of rumpling Jack's hair (a thing he hates!), but such condescension did the victor bestow upon the vanquished. Then she went away, saying that she wouldn't go out that afternoon, she would lie down and try to sleep instead. Granny also left to finish her nap more comfortably, after making arrangements to drive with Uncle Tom in an hour's time; but he seemed so pleased with our society that he stayed on and on. Well, he did spin some mighty good yarns, I'll own, though I couldn't half listen for wondering what dreadful fate had befallen Judy. There we all were,

with news at hand, and yet our watchword was only too painfully true among us. At last Uncle Tom took himself off and we three fell on the Delegates.

And this is the story that greeted our listening ears:

The girls reached Cousin Laura's closet after many false starts (there's where the mistake was made in the beginning, though I considerately refrained from more than pointing it out), and just as they were about to do the momentous deed they heard bloodcurdling footsteps coming nearer and ever nearer. They screwed up their courage—somehow—and peeked cautiously out, only to see Hortense, Cousin Laura's maid, bearing down upon them. At the hideous sight their teeth chattered in their heads—they were undone! Mercifully, however, one of the servants called her and she went out into the large hall, leaving the door of the closet free; which opportunity was instantaneously seized by the conspirators, who scampered to safer places of hiding. And none too soon. Hortense was back in a jiffy, with the step of a grenadier and the face of a pirate. It would have gone pretty hard with anybody

caught trespassing at that time, I can tell you. Then she began to put away clothes, and take them out in a senseless fashion, and during one of her disappearances into a wardrobe, Margery, who'd hidden behind the window curtains, crept out, making her way later to us with all the distress signals flying, but so muddled up that others were blamed for her stupidity. Sheila had gone on all-fours back of the lounge and there she had to wait until she got her chance to escape. Then only poor Judy remained. And it was precisely as if she were held fast by manacles of iron. She couldn't get out. *She was under the bed—hidden from a cruel world!* The muslin ruffle, falling to the floor, concealed the maiden's form from view; she could even stretch at length, though her couch wasn't one of roses. But that which kept out the gleam of prying eyes kept out the air as well. And it was piping hot; it was —I don't know how many degrees of Frying-heat.

A groan rose from our throats that almost reached high heaven, as we heard of her captive state; then—suddenly—we grew groanless. Our tongues refused to move. Horror—Cri-

key!—Horror—COUSIN LAURA HAD GONE UPSTAIRS TO LIE DOWN.

The moments went on, creeping leadenly by. Granny and Uncle Tom started for their drive, and we still sat where they had left us, a prey to gloom that grew gloomier and ever gloomier until you could have cut it off in great chunks. Judy was out of reach of any aid. We could not rescue her, we could not—dared not—even brighten the age-long hours of her imprisonment. We were forbidden to go on the other side of the house of an afternoon. For Cousin Laura, so she said herself, was a Victim to Insomnia—which is something suffered by wide-awake people at night, and which means not being able to sleep as much as you would like to, and having to drink hot water, or take powders, or count sheep over a fence; so she was obliged to make up her rest after luncheon in her own room—she never was caught napping downstairs!—and woe betide the person who disturbed her slumbers. We were warned beforehand.

But Judy—my poor old Judy. It made me ache all over to picture her lying under the bed. I knew in my heart that if I'd been in

her place she would have found some way to let me know that, though she couldn't drag me out with her own two hands, she was, at least, thinking of me. She would have broken a thousand rules to do it. No punishment would have frightened her off. And yet, though I was chock-full of longing to do something for her, I couldn't make a single plan. Then suddenly I remembered Richard, *Coeur de Lion,* and how his minstrel sang under his window to prove to him that there was still one faithful heart left to love him. In an instant I was on my feet, in another I had outlined my course of action to my companions, in a third I had started determinedly away. Their cries couldn't restrain me, their flesh-creeping whispers of the doom that would surely be mine simply rolled off me as the water rolls off a duck's back. I bade them go about their own business, and then I went on with mine. But I was pretty glad they couldn't see around the corner of the house, for my legs got so dreadfully wobbly, and each foot seemed to weigh a ton.

Now, I hope you'll believe that my mind was not in a pranking frame just then, neither

did I want to do anything to annoy Cousin Laura. Far otherwise. I was honestly sorry to disturb her rest, but there was no choice in the matter. I couldn't let Judy suffer any longer in silence. It came over me, as I pulled myself along, that that Blondel fellow may have had the chills run up and down his spine, too, when he thought of what the Authorities might do if they caught him. And still he kept on undaunted. He just put whackings, and imprisonments, and fines, into one side of the balance, and his love for his poor, unhappy master into the other, and his love far outweighed everything else.

When Cousin Laura's window was reached, I took up my stand beneath it and prepared to pucker, though my lips were so dry and trembly I couldn't get them into whistling shape. I started in on "Where is my wandering boy to-night?" but it was such a ghost of the real thing that his own mother wouldn't have recognized him. It really wasn't a go at all. A day-old bird would have cheeped louder. The trouble was, I was thinking too much of Cousin Laura, and of my own skin, and not enough of Judy. I soon saw that that would

never do, so I got myself together and bade good-by to whistling—it was too remote, and unfeeling. Blondel didn't whistle—except, perhaps, one shrill "Hist, Sire!" It was the singing that did the business, and, of course, he struck his light guitar, which helped out his voice when it quavered too much, while the tune kept up his courage. I was guitarless, but I had to sail in; so I threw caution to the winds—it was do and dare on the moment.

I took a blade of grass and, placing it between my thumbs, I blew one long, ear-splitting squawk, then—as the shivered silence came together again—I waited with my heart and tongue very near to each other. It seemed a thousand years that I stood rooted to the spot, yet there was no sign from the closely shuttered window above me to show that my call had fallen on waking ears. In other times Richard had waved his kingly hand between his prison-bars, seeing which, the faithful one could proceed more cheerfully with his serenade. I expected nothing of the kind; I wasn't such a silly as to think Judy would give any sign. She couldn't. Mum was the word, and numb, too—I guess—as far as she was con-

cerned. The very least stir, or outcry, on her part and the S. P. O. D. would be forever wrecked. She had to keep low and still, though I knew she wouldn't drop off to sleep. She couldn't afford to. In sleep you're not always accountable for yourself—you may breathe deeper than you wot of, or you may roll, or have a falling-down-a-precipice feeling and start wildly. All these things may be done with safety on a bed, but not under one, especially if your Cousin Laura is there outstretched taking a nap.

So I felt sure Judy's pulses were thumping quicker because of the daringness of the deed, but she had yet to learn who the Doer of it was, though she was probably saying to herself that she was almost certain. I opened my lips, and after one little gasp—the kind you give when the water is icy—I broke into "Wait till the clouds roll by." I sang it through with expressiveness, then I tried "I want yer, my honey, yes, I do,"—but one verse of that was all I could manage, and I quickly exchanged it for something almost as appropriate. I was just bellowing out at the top of my lungs, "In the swee-eet by-and-by, we shall meet on

that——" when a blind was thrown angrily open, and a sharp, but still slumbery, voice drowned my soaring one.

"Miscreant, stop that terrible noise," it cried. "Stop it, do you hear me? Why—Philip—Philip Egerton, can I believe my two eyes? How dare you, sir, how dare you? Vacate the premises at once. I shall tell your grandmother."

I went immediately. I thought it safest to clear out. You know I hadn't wanted to annoy, but only to cheer one who was dearer to me far than Cousin Laura, and I had succeeded, though it was at a fearful expense to myself. Judy knew, in every part of her aching body, that her friends hadn't forgotten her, that one of their number, at least, was ready to go to the stake for her. At the same time, now that the deed was done, I wasn't in any very great hurry to get to the stake part of the affair. That would come all too soon. The noise of opening shutters, banged smartly back against the house, made me look around in the thick of the flight, and I instantly felt, with a queer sinking in my chest, that Cousin Laura's nap was well

over for that day. Her windows were letting in the last rays of the setting sun, and she was getting ready for the fray with unusual rapidness. In a short time, too, Granny would be back from her drive, and then——

Meanwhile, I was hungry—very hungry—and prison fare would surely be meted out to me as part punishment for my sins, to say the least! But I could expect no kindness at Sophy's hands—I was deep in her black looks just then—nor could I hook anything from her pantry, because she was there getting things fixed for our supper. Then I resolved to seek out Duke.

Of all Granny's servants Duke is our favorite. He has been butler at Uplands for thirty years and is just like one of the family in many ways, though in other respects but a humble servitor. When he was young he had serious thoughts of being an actor, then he discovered that Granny couldn't possibly get on without him, so he gave up his own dreams of ambition and stayed faithfully at his post. Which was no end noble of him. His real, baptized name was Romeo Wellington, though no one ever used it. Grandfather (this happened long

ago, you know) dubbed him "Duke," after the iron fellow, and he was always called that. And what's more, he said he liked it, which does but prove again his obliging disposition.

I knew where I should find him. He is always in his pantry of an afternoon, with a fat, blue Shakespeare book open on the shelf before him, though never too deep in his studies to give you a taste of the real fire if yours isn't a guying frame of mind. When I sneaked in he was pegging away, as usual, and started up half scared; then—when he saw who it was—he waved me to one side and advanced with arms folded on his chest and head lowered. I felt it was too serious a time for idle listening. He might treat me to pages before I could cut in with a word, and Granny would descend in her wrath upon me in my famished state, so I threw myself on his mercy and told him what I'd done—not why I'd done it.

He stood gaping at me, and at first I thought he hadn't heard, he's often mooney. Then I began all over again, but he stopped me, got into a stained-window glass attitude, and said in the awfullest accents:

"'Methought I hyern a v'ice cry, "Sleep no mo',
Macbeth's done murdered sleep"—de innercints sleep—
Sleep dat knots up de ragged sleeves er care,
De deaf in each day's life, sore Laban's bath—'"

"Oh! for pity's sake, Duke," I interrupted, fairly dancing from one foot to the other, "please listen to me——"

It was no use, he went on with his spouting:

"'Still hit cried, "Sleep no mo'!" ter all de house.
Phillup's done murdered sleep, en so Miss Laura
Shall sleep no mo'—Miss Laura shall sleep no mo'!'"

Above his deep roarings I could hear the old clock in the dining-room ticking the moments at racing speed, and I almost fancied there was the sound of horses' hoofs coming up the drive. I felt all the anguish of a starving man; if there'd been a thing in sight that I could have grabbed I'd have made a try for it, although Duke has muscles. I was desperate.

"Stow your old Shakespeare," I fumed, "I've had enough of him, I'm famished——" I dodged as I spoke, for I expected he would

fire something at me, but instead, he just gasped like a fish out of water. At last he found his voice.

"Go to, boy," he thundered, "bay not me. I'll not endure hit. Huccome you dar set yo' foot in my kingdom? Avaunt en quit my sight, or I'll git atter you des sho' es you lib, I ain' gwine ter be sassed at my ve'y po'tals. Don' talk ter me, suh. Dere, dere, you sutney has yo' troubles, en I'll show you marcy, caze de quality er marcy has been trained. Dis heart er mine won' neber let you die for lack er a dinner, ef dar libs anyt'ing in dis yer pantry. I fergib you, my prince er Sleep-wakers!

"'Oncet I wuz a lil, teeny boy,
Wid a hey, ho, de win', en de rain.'"

I could scarcely believe my ears, and still less my eyes, for while he was speaking, and bursting into song, that noble man moved about, gathering things together. First he brought out a little pile of lettuce sandwiches, next a fistful of sweet biscuits, then he whipped off the skin from a monster peach and turned some velvety cream over it, and last of all he added a chocolate cake to the repast. After

which, he stood back and waved his hands like a prestodigitator.

"Fall to en feed, en welcome ter dis yer table," he cried, "en let not indiagestion wait upon yo' appetite."

I pitched in; I didn't have to be told twice. Nor did I stop to thank him; I couldn't, very well, for I had to bolt things lively, but the proving of the pudding is the eating of it, and he could see for himself how it went down with me. Just as the last crumb vanished there came the sound of a clarion voice calling my name.

Duke whisked a napkin quickly over my face without so much as a "By your leave," but I bore no malice.

"Fo' de Lawd, boy, yo' time is come," he stuttered in a grisly whisper, "dey's hollerin' fer you, sho's you bo'n. Away!"

I reached out and wrung his hand heartily, part of me was feeling better, at least, then I turned and left him and his voice rolled solemnly after me:

"'Oh, now, forber, far'well de tranquil min',
Far'well content—'"

I didn't wait to hear more—it was too unsettling—I just rushed headlong to my doom. Granny was standing in the hall and, as I reached her, I saw by her face that she had heard the worst. Still, she asked, with all fairness, for my side of the story.

Well, you know, there was none, except the inside, which couldn't be told, so I had to plead guilty to all the charges brought against me. I couldn't give any explanation—wouldn't, she believed.

"But you must be able to account for your actions," she almost wailed. "I've never known you so disobedient, nor so unmanly, for it's most unmanly to torment anyone who is suffering. You wake refreshed every morning, and you can't understand what it means to endure long, sleepless hours. But poor Cousin Laura doesn't rest well, and sometimes she is able to make up her sleep in the afternoon, as you know. I am willing to overlook many things because of your years, but I am never willing to forgive you for being cruel, and dishonest."

"I'm neither," I muttered huskily. There

are often moments when a fellow is justified in crying, and I would have cried at this junction —her words cut into me so—but I had to keep a stiff upper lip.

"I can only think you were purposely cruel to annoy Cousin Laura, when you knew she was lying down," Granny said coldly. "And it is not what *I* call honest for you to say that you were sorry at the time of committing the wrong. If you were so sorry, why did you persist in singing? Answer me that."

"I can't," I owned up. "I had a reason, of course, but I can't ever tell you why I done it. Only I did—and I was really and truly sorry for Cousin Laura all the time."

Granny got crimson, and her foot came down rather hard on the floor.

"Don't say that again," she cried sharply. "You shall go without your supper——"

"And I ain't dishonest," I interrupted, speaking very fast, "I ain't the least dishonest. You'll have to punish me some other way, too, I've already had some bully things to eat."

Granny glared dumfoundedly at me.

"I got Duke to give them to me," I went on. "But you mustn't blame him, please, it

was all my prevailing. I was starving and I felt you'd be sure to say 'no supper,' so I thought it was best to be on the safe side. He gave me some corking nice rations—he's a daisy, and no mistake!"

"Since you've taken the punishment out of my hands," Granny said darkly, "I shall have to call on your Uncle."

It was my turn to stare—and I did, with a mouth that wouldn't stay shut. I was still staring when Uncle Tom came into the hall in answer to the summons. His face was very long and solemn, and he avoided looking my way. Anyone could see that Cousin Laura had been up and at it—pouring her woes into his ears. Then Granny told him her side of the story, and used those same words—cruel, dishonest, unmanly—over and over until they seemed to press on me like a ton. But there wasn't the least sense in my saying anything—I had to keep still. Only it was mighty hard to have Uncle Tom think me such a low-down chap—though that couldn't be helped either. Granny proceeded to give him certain instructions, while he kept muttering something about "other people's children" and showed very

plainly by his looks that he wanted to cut the whole business. But she wouldn't let him off, so he had to give in. As she turned to leave the hall she said to me:

"When your uncle has finished with you, Philip, you are to go directly to bed in the little room next to Hannah's. In the morning you will ask Cousin Laura's pardon, and remain in seclusion for the rest of the day." Then she whispered: "Not very hard, Tom—remember!" And after that she cleared out.

There was a short and painful silence, which Uncle Tom was the first to break.

"What possessed you to raise such an infernal rumpus?" he asked savagely.

I told him what I'd told Granny, and I looked him straight in the eyes as I spoke. In an instant, though I saw him reach for a cane, I felt a load fall off my shoulders. He believed in me!

He stretched out his free hand and I gave him my fist quickly to prove that I bore him no ill-will. We shook hands warmly—understandingly—then he moved back a few paces.

"I hate to do this thing, kid," he said, "but

it's got to be done, so we might as well get it over as soon as possible."

"That's all right," I answered, putting on a cheerful grin. "Don't you take it to heart, my son. And, I say, you needn't mind Granny's caution—just you hit as hard as ever you can."

## CHAPTER IX

### THE S. P. O. D. IN WORKING TRIM

GRANNY really tries to be just, and one good thing about her is that she doesn't ask people to peach on a fellow; so that's how none of the other Preventers were dragged into this affair, which was as it should be. Of course they knew I'd been caught, and punished, too, but they didn't know about that latter business, and you can bet your hat I didn't mean to tell them. The matter was strictly between Uncle Tom and me—myself. He and I parted the best of friends, and I liked him better still the next morning. It was Granny who brought that about. As I was going to Cousin Laura's room she stopped me.

"You know the programme for the rest of the day, Phil," she said, as solemn as a judge. "You are to stay in the schoolroom where your meals will be served; I have already told the other children that they are not to speak to you, and I think I may trust you to keep

silent. I also wish to tell you that I take back what I said about 'dishonesty' and 'unmanliness.'"

Now, wasn't that handsome? I'd have stayed a month of Sundays in the schoolroom on bread and water with no 'hookings,' and no 'communications,' if she'd wanted me to. And wasn't Uncle Tom a brick to let her see what a man's belief in a boy's word was worth? I suppose he was quicker in recognizing what it stood for than she, because he'd been a boy himself.

After that, I got through my interview with Cousin Laura far easier than I'd expected. I begged her pardon in the politest way I knew how, and let her nag as much as she chose without a look, or a sign, to madden her; then I retired to my dungeon cell with a light heart. But my doom hung over the other Preventers like a darksome cloud, and they crept around all day as if they'd lost their best friend (which was, of course, true for the time being), and Judy—in particular—was so forlorn that she kept by herself and wouldn't even speak to the crowd.

Hers had been a sad and grievous history.

The shades of night had stopped falling and were down for keeps before she was able to make her escape, because—after Cousin Laura had sailed off to her interview with Granny —Hortense was forever tidying up the room. She's slow about everything but her tongue, which is French and a rattler—and her temper, too—French, also, and my! so quick. Judy said it was more than double-quick when Hortense thought she was all alone by herself; the foiled conspirator just lay and quaked, with not knowing what the dreadful swishing around would bring to light. But nothing happened. And at last the moment came when she could creep out. Which she did, though very stiffly, and then she joined the others in no cheerful frame of mind.

If you will believe it, Judy was especially cast down about my deed; she was, in fact, almost angry. That afternoon, when I gave the first sign of being under the window, a little glow, she said, took her right in the heart, and set her tingling with gladness. Of course she guessed who it was instantly—you can't ever fool her! Then the glow died down and she hated to have me sing; she wanted me to

go away, she kept praying—actually praying —to have me go. It was some minutes before my serenade woke Cousin Laura, who was sleeping out loud like Gilbert at his worst, but Judy couldn't warn me off, and I went on and on, till—you know what happened! The rest of her stay under the bed seemed never-ending; she kept growing miserabler and miserabler, fancying the horrid punishments that would fall upon my devoted head. I suppose Richard felt that way when Blondel was singing his tunefullest. Only what made it worst of all to Judy was the fact that she couldn't tell why I'd broken laws, and rest; the honor of our new-born society was in her keeping, and she couldn't make my sacrifice all in vain.

Sometimes it pays to stay away from people, because when you go back to them again you find how much they care for you, and with what rejoicings they gather you unto themselves. Gilbert wanted to treat the whole crowd to soda-water in my honor, and Jack made a speech about the great and noble deed I'd done, and how it ought to be told long ages after. He proposed a monument of some

kind, and the girls were for breaking open their banks to start a fund, but I was firm and said "Cheese it!" They all agreed, however, that my singing was the bravest thing out, and they wondered at my grit in keeping it up. Judy's eyes fairly shone and—though she kept saying that she truthfully wished I hadn't done it, now that I had—you could see she was almost bursting with pride. Yes, it was pretty sweet to come back and have such attentiveness showered upon me, and it was on the tip of my tongue to tell what I had really suffered, what very-far-beneath-the-dignity-of-a-President cruelties had been showered upon me, then—somehow—though I knew I'd be a greater hero in their sight than ever—I kept still. It would have hurt Judy more than it had me (Uncle Tom's muscles were flabbier than they looked), to know what deeps of deggerydation I had sounded for her sake. She'd have hated Uncle Tom, and I'm sure she'd have considered Granny a relentless tyrant like those chaps of old.

If you think all this put a stop to the plan about the bells, you are wrong. It only planted it firmer in our resolveful breasts, but we had

brought one thing from our late experience, and that was—Caution. The bells were to be used for the purpose for which they'd been bought, though they couldn't be sewn broadcast as had been our original idea. One would have to do on a gown, and it would have to be placed where Hortense's eagle eyes wouldn't behold it, even if it spoke but faintly to Cousin Laura's ear. The girls fairly thirsted to try again and, of course, we let them. They had to redeem their failure. We gave them orders until our throats were sore, and they crossed their hearts solemn that they'd do just what they were told. At last, after taking their young lives in their hands and having many a fearful risk, they succeeded in anchoring three bells. Then we waited.

Some days passed and with their passing we were bothered by two questions: Would the bells really ring? and when would Cousin Laura wear the gowns? She seemed to steer clear of them as if she suspected something was in the wind. Finally, when we were sunk in despair, word was brought by the Running Delegate that Cousin Laura had on her lilac muslin. We fellows didn't know lilac from

blue, but we did know what Margery's mysteriousness meant, and we chortled in our sleeves. Almost directly the six of us, singly and in pairs, straggled out on the side veranda with Sunday-school expressions on our faces, which went down because the day was so warm.

Granny and Uncle Tom were sitting there, and they brightened right up at sight of us (though we did look duller than dull). With a haste that showed we were more than welcome, they asked us to stay, and we accepted the invitation gladly, our hearts going a bit faster in spite of our calm outsides as we took our seats. Cousin Laura was in the Blue room at Granny's desk, her lilac gown floating around her like a still cloud at even. By and by she finished her letters and came out on the veranda, and as she came a low tinkling sound was borne upon the summer air. The brave little bell was getting busy! I shot one glance at Jack—he was as grave as a judge, but he winked the eye that was farthest from Granny and I knew he had heard. So had Cousin Laura. Her eyebrows were all puckered up as she stopped suddenly and looked about

with queer little jerks of her head, exactly the way a fool canary goes on.

"I thought I heard one of those cats," she cried crossly.

"I don't hear anything," Granny put in, in her soothingest voice, "and Cook has orders to keep them in her own part of the house. It's just fancy on your part, dear."

The cats—four in number—were Cook's especial property, and she loved them with a love that was more than strong. Jerusha, the mother cat, seldom went far from the kitchen, but her three kittens had gambolling dispositions and liked to see the world. Their names were Goodness, Gracious, Me, and Cook had a habit of calling them all at the same time. I believe she had the habit long before they were born, so that's how the names happened to be handy when they came along. They were nice young things, as cats go, and as the dogs got along first-rate with them, peace reigned serene in every breast but one.

"My fancy doesn't generally ring bells, Janet," Cousin Laura said, with a high and haughty air, "and I've been hearing them more

or less all the morning. Not that *that* need disturb anybody. But even the most faithful servant will some time grow careless, and it is my impression that such is the case now. If a woman is allowed to maintain an army of cats, it is not to be wondered at if they elude her vigilance. We will, however, drop the subject."

She continued her walk to her chair, swishing her skirts the way ladies do when they ain't just pleased with things, and the air was full of music.

"What do you call that?" she demanded, stopping again. "Is that fancy?"

"I certainly did hear something," Granny owned up, her dear face full of many different expressions.

"Well, I should say as much," Cousin Laura declared; "I'm glad you've come to your senses at last." Then she went on swiftly, fiercely, and even prayerfully: "Won't somebody drive away that cat—those cats? For mercy sake, children, do try to be useful for once in your lives."

Down sprawled Gilbert and Judy on the floor in a jiffy, while Jack and I made a dash

for the vines at the side where we could make believe look, and hide our grinning countenances at the same time. Granny jumped to her feet and began calling, "Puss, Puss"; Uncle Tom got up in a great hurry and peered under chairs and tables, and the two Delegates scrambled around on their hands and knees, their faces full of do-and-dare seriousness. Everybody was in commotion except Cousin Laura, who stood like a graven image in the centre of the veranda directing the search. Sheila kept circling about her, nearer and ever nearer; at last she jostled against the lilac train and gave it (unseen) a hearty shake.

"There!" cried Cousin Laura, jumping as if she'd been shot.

"Oh! I'm sure that was Me," Sheila exclaimed with the soberness of a lady deacon.

I snickered outright. The owdacaciousness of that girl was too much for my centre of gravity, and Cousin Laura would certainly have caught on the next moment, for she wasn't napping, I can tell you, but Jack and Judy rushed to the rescue, crying, "Scat!" at the top of their united lungs.

"Where?" shrieked Cousin Laura, and

again there was a tremendous jingle; she'd jumped pretty high.

"That sounds like Goodness' bell," Margery called from under the table, "but I don't see him anywhere."

"Goodness! Don't goodness me," Cousin Laura snapped. "Have Cook in at once and discharge her—I insist upon it, Janet—I don't care if she does know how to make entrées, she doesn't know other things—and an order is an order. You really must impress upon her, Janet, that she will have to leave unless she obeys you in this matter. My poor nerves can't stand it. Tom, bring me that chair—so—now a footstool, please. Yes, I'll have them both right here—right here on this very spot—I'm not going to budge an inch. I shall sit here without stirring until those cats are caught and decapitated."

She sat down, but not without a good deal of tinkling, and while she tucked her skirts closely around her the music went on and on, which brought forth more shrieks and more angry commands. By and by she got fixed and then she kept us on the go, moving chairs, shaking up pillows, working a lot, but no

giddy young cats jumped out to reward our efforts. Calm came back slowly to Cousin Laura's majestic brow, and she breathed the breath of relief once more. We sat around and waited, sober and quiet outside, but inside almost ready to burst with fun. It grew dull, monstrously so, though we comforted ourselves with the thought that the circus was bound to come again. And yet we missed it after all. Cousin Laura was interested in her book and kept so quiet that no faintest jingle disturbed her peace, and we were obliged to trot off soon to our own dinner.

But the little bell could be trusted to go ahead and do its duty, and I rather fancy the grown-ups' luncheon wasn't an altogether unlively meal. I strolled around careless-like after it was over to see Duke. He looked worn out and down in the dumps, and when I asked in friendly fashion if his head ached, he said no, but his back did, and he muttered something about "sweet bells jangling, out er tune en harsh." So I could pretty well size up what had taken place. Gilbert tackled Cook on his own hook and found her crosser than a sick bear, whereupon he started in to cheer her up,

but she lost her temper completely and cried, "Goodness, Gracious, Me!"—though she didn't mean the cats—also, she made a dive for a broom, and Gilbert, who is a prudent boy, took to his heels.

Cousin Laura went to bed early that afternoon and when she appeared in the evening she wore another gown; the lilac thing was a morning affair. There was no music about her, so—our time being precious—we didn't hang around very long. The next day Judy overheard Hortense talking to Hannah, and it seems that the cats actually followed Cousin Laura to her own room, and Hortense was obliged to get down on her hands and knees —"wiz ze palpitayshuns-s-s"—and look under the bed and under every other piece of furniture. (My! she must have been a figure of fun—she's such a roly-poly.) But nothing was discovered—nothing!—so finally Cousin Laura dropped off to sleep. Then Hortense knew a little peace. Still, she declared, it was all so mysterious that she was going to overhaul the gown herself; she thought it might be "w'at you call—'aunted" by a kitten's spirit. She is a person of small educa-

tion, as you can see from that remark, though we were everlastingly grateful to her for not being ashamed of the way she'd been brought up. If she'd kept her thoughts to herself I know not what would have happened. As it was, the moment she left Hannah and went off to air her grievances to the other servants, Judy, who'd been sitting at one side, pretending to read—sprinted like a good one to Cousin Laura's closet and had the bell off in a jiffy. But she left the tinklers on the other gowns. Yet, though we waited long and patiently, we heard nothing from them. It so happened that one of the dresses was too heavy for summer wear, and the other was a muslin which Cousin Laura seldom put on. The girls were crazy to sew elsewhere, but, as President, I was all for delay. We couldn't afford to be rash.

In the meantime, as the days passed, the S. P. O. D. got into splendid working order; we went boldly from one deed to another, and knew no gloom anywhere. Uncle Tom came in for his share of the pranks, I can tell you, though he gave no sign, except for a queer gleam in his eyes, which meant that he'd take it out of us some day. Nor were the servants

neglected, even the great Duke himself didn't escape. You see, I was the only one to have that supper, and—Oh! well, you've got to rake in everybody when you once start out to prevent dulness.

# CHAPTER X

## "BUTTERED SOLES"

At Uplands, if you want to go to the dining-room from the drawing-room you must pass through the great hall, which is built with a large open space in the centre, the ceiling of it being the roof far above. Around this opening on each of the two upper storeys a gallery runs, and anybody on either floor can look over the railing into the hall below and see just what is going on there without being seen. We children knew this only too well. And that's why we stationed ourselves quietly in the first gallery the evening Granny gave the dinner to the Bishop and his wife. Of course, there were other guests besides, but those two were the most honored ones. We were all dressed up in our spandiest best, for, though we weren't invited to the feast, we were expected to appear after it was over and be put through our paces. That isn't just the way Granny expressed it, but it's what she meant.

The Bishop and his wife are very fond of children, and they'd asked to see us all—us four particularly, for Mother had been like a dear child of their very own in the long ago, because of a little child they'd once loved, and though we were strangers to them, they were ready to take us to their hearts for her sake.

It was a rainy night, so we hadn't been able to see the guests from the schoolroom windows, because the carriages and motors were closed, but that didn't cast us down. We'd made up our minds to watch them go in to dinner, and as the procession passed beneath us we leaned over the balustrade. There was small danger of our being noticed. People, at such times, don't gaze up at the stars; they keep their eyes on the ground to see how to navigate, the gentlemen taking care not to trip over the ladies' dresses, or they glance at each other while they're conversational. We had naught to fear.

Granny and the Bishop led the van, both as smiling as baskets of chips; he was a big, tall man with such a beaming face that Judy said he was a dear, quite out loud, and Jack and

I had to reduce her to silence with our elbows. Then a grim looking lady, with a nose like a parrot's, sailed by, hooking along a fat little old gentleman whose shiny forehead went back almost to his coat collar; he toddled as if he were walking on eggs, though I think the trouble was Tight Pumps—he wore such a painful grin. Behind them came Cousin Laura, very grand and handsome, in a trailing gown that sent out lovely jingly sounds as she walked. The tinkle came up to us clearly, and Sheila instantly whispered, with a giggle, that the four bells under the flounce were doing their little best. We thought they were! We knew Cousin Laura could hear the ring-a-ching-ching by the way her head kept bobbing. She didn't pay the least attention to Dr. Grantley, who trotted at her side, though they're the greatest of friends. She hadn't any eyes for him, but only for the whisking tails of rollicking kittens, seemingly so near, and yet so unperceivable!

The music passed on. Then two young ladies, all smiles, and fun, and prettiness, hove into sight, and our girls nearly toppled over the railing. But the young men with the young

ladies were far too busy looking sideways to think of glancing anywhere else, and Uncle Tom—who brought up the rear with the Bishop's wife—kept his eyes fixed straight before him, though she was just fine, with a beamy face like her husband's. She was the only one of the lot to look up—for she belonged to the understanding kind—yet she didn't give us away. Not she! On the moment she seemed to twinkle all over with fun, and she put her hand to her lips as if she were going to cough—then, as if she thought it wasn't manners, she took it down again. That's what Uncle Tom would have supposed, if he'd seen the action, instead of keeping his eyes glued on Miss Sally Day's pink gown and her pretty, crinkly, brown hair. We knew better. We caught on quicker than you could say Jack Robinson, and the kiss blown our way was met by kisses blown back instanter by the girls, and by hand-wavings from us fellows.

The next minute the hall was deserted, but before I could speak Gilbert pointed out what a bully chance we'd missed for Article 5 on Judy's list of Simple Pranks. He said

that if we hadn't "elevated objects," we might, at least, have dangled them, and he wished he'd mentioned it earlier to the Society, for he was sure that Dulness had gone into the dining room with the second, third, and last couples—and being Preventers, we ought to have kept it away. We others didn't contradict him, though we all felt that if we'd started in on Article 5 we'd have been caught and sentenced before the assembled dinner-party in double-quick time.

It was dreadfully quiet after the little procession had disappeared. We missed the low hum of voices and the soft bursts of grown-up laughter; we even felt lonely, though there were so many of us. Then we crept noiselessly down to the great hall and straightway things chirked right up. It was lots more socialistic there on account of its nearness to the dining room; the lights were cheerfuller, too, and the flowers sweeter than they'd seemed from above; you have to be in the midst of things to enjoy them really. We sat around as stiff as pokers, the girls, in particular, not lolling a bit, on account of their frills, and we waited—we kept on waiting. By and by it

grew as dull in the hall as it had been looking down at it. The outside of a dinner-party was a terrible thing to us. We asked conundrums in hoarse whispers, we tried "When, where, and how do you like it?" and everyone was so stupid that the game had to be given up. I looked at my pumps gloomily, Jack glowered at his, and Gilbert started in on a yawn that set us all gaping until our jaws almost cracked open.

Suddenly Judy, as if she couldn't stand it a moment longer, got up with a bounce. Her face was quite grim with determination, and she didn't pay the least attention to the surprise in ours, she just shook out her skirts and then tiptoed across the hall to the dining room. We sat motionless, gazing after her in envy. No one else had dared to peek, though I'll bet we all had thought of it. After what seemed like a never-ending stay by the curtains, she joined us again and declared that we had jollier times at our own table. Lots. But we wouldn't take her word for it. No sir-ee. Each in turn went over and peeped in, and each came back disgusted. The maiden had spoken all too true. Gilbert was the last

to go and we thought he wouldn't hurry, as there was no one to slip into his place, but he hardly stayed a second.

"I couldn't make out a thing," he grumbled, "yet the grown-ups are always at us to speak distinctly, though they don't practice what they preach by a long shot. They're a crowd of Mumbley-pegs, the whole of 'em. And I couldn't see much either, except Duke and the other men circulating around promiscuous. I don't think there will ever be any end to It."

"There's bound to be,—some time," I cut in with a cheerfulness I was far from feeling. "Well, you can bet, when I'm a man, if I ever have to give such a stupid thing as a dinner-party, there won't be any outside to it to drive people to distraction. It's too awful. Let's play 'Objects.'"

The others agreed in don't-careish tones; we were dreadfully low in our minds, and tired, too. If we'd been younger, and still believed in childhood's early tales, we'd have been willing to declare that the bent figure of an old man, with a bag of sand on his back, was gliding about among us. But we'd said

good-by to such fairy stories long ago, only——

"It's decided that we play 'Objects,'" I said, sitting up straight and speaking in a very go-ahead voice, "so I'll open the ball."

Now, I know not if the game is played by the Young of all Nations; I used to think we'd made it up, until Jack and Sheila came to Uplands. They lived remote from us—as you may remember—and yet they knew it, and—what's more—they had the nerve to say they'd originated it. They called it "Describings." So others may have brightened dragging hours with the same sport; it's a good sit-down game for journeys by land, or sea. This is how it's done: You describe some object, visible to the undressed eye, in such a roundabout way that the other fellows have to put on their thinking-caps to guess what you're driving at. And when they catch on, they answer in words that you have to puzzle over in your turn.

I cast a slow glance around. The hall, which was lighted with electric lights shining softly through big red roses that were fastened on the impanelled walls, was fur-

nished like a room, with tables, and chairs, and dandy dive-ins—we were all seated on one of the latter ourselves. When we first came to Uplands there was a fire on the big hearth and a rug covered the floor completely, but as soon as warm weather set in the fire was given the go-by, and quite lately, with the coming of the greater heat, Granny had had the rug taken away and the floor, which was of tasselated marble, was left bare. It was very cool to look at, and gave out a cheerful ring when you stepped on it—which carpets do not. I gazed fixedly at one of the electroliers.

"I see an Object," I began, "that makes me think of brave explorers in Arctic regions, white it is as a frozen sea, bound——"

"Nuff said, my hearty," giggled Jack, "I see that object too, and Polar bears may glide upon it——"

"Give us something less hard, something we won't have to trample under foot," Gilbert cried, and the Delegates piped out in a breath: "Silks and satins have lately rustled o'er it."

Judy was the only one to be quiet, she sat gazing straight before her as though she

hadn't heard a thing. I gave her a wakeful poke.

"A frozen sea," she murmured dreamily, "and the little dark spots are where the ice is thinner. It would be a grand skating-place."

"Our rollers are upstairs, and they'd make no end of a row," Gilbert objected.

"I didn't mean rollers, they're only for babies," Judy cried, with her nose in the air; then she stood up and faced us. "And I didn't mean skating, either," she went on. "Jack was right when he said Polar bears would glide upon it—I meant glide, and slide—slide as if it were out-of-doors on a winter's day." She stopped for a moment. "And we could do it, too," she added before any of us could speak, "that is, if we'd something on our shoes to make them slippery." Again there was a breathless pause. "Butter would fix the business," she finished.

If you'll believe it, her words knocked us silly, we hadn't a thing to say. We could only gaze and gaze, our mouths so wide open you'd have thought they'd never shut again.

"I know just where Granny's table butter

is kept," Judy whispered quickly, her "s's" sounding like angry serpents as they tumbled over one another, "there won't be the least trouble in the world, and if the store-room is locked one of the boys can squirm in through the hall window and hand it out."

"But——" began Sheila.

"There's no but about it," Judy flashed, "it's all butter. The game is my very own origination, and if you don't like it you can just do the other thing. All those wanting to be sliders stand up!"

We were on our feet in a jiffy—the whole gang of us—there were to be no lookers-on. Judy beamed all over with delight, and in a few moments our plans were made. Then we set out—Judy, Jack, and I—our hearts beating like drums in our ears. It was clear sailing all the way, and even when the store-room was reached, we found that Fortune still smiled upon us. The key was in the lock! We crept stealthily into the cool, dark place, leaving the door ajar that the light from the hall might come in, and there on the swinging shelf, within easy reach, was the butter on a big wooden tray covered by a netting frame.

This latter we took off, and Jack and I lifted down the tray, which held the yellow oblongs, each marked, as we knew well, with the Golden Cross dairy stamp. Then we carried it back to the others, Judy acting as advance guard with her skirts spread wide. Gilbert met us at the door and piloted us eagerly forward.

"They're pitching into the birds," he announced, "we must hurry."

We did. In less than a second we'd put an end to the Golden Cross stamp by stamps of our own, and the trim shapes were beaten down on every side. Then the sport began, and, I tell you what, it was glorious! If you've ever been the outside of anything and have known the tediousness of waiting, with each moment growing longer than the one before, you'll understand the giddy joy that filled us 'most to bursting. We made our own shining paths; usually in an out-of-doors' slide you have to take turns, but ours was a real sea of glass, and we went hither and thither with puckered-up lips to keep back our shouts. The polar bears in their native haunts never gambolled more light-heartedly than we did. The fun grew faster and furiouser, we

THEN THE SPORT BEGAN, AND I TELL YOU WHAT, IT WAS GLORIOUS!

put on more butter, and more again. There was plenty for us all.

Suddenly, in the very midst of our bliss, there was a loud bump, and instantly a hideous howl burst upon the air and went up to the listening stars. Not even the most polaric bear could have uttered such a sound. And there wasn't any end to it—it kept on, growing in force, and changing from a howl into an unmistakable human yell that was like—no, I can't tell you what it was like—you wouldn't believe me. It was so dreadful. We tried to stop it. We said, "Shish!" and "Shut up!" in vain. Margery—it was Margery—was outspread on our glistering sea, and she wouldn't give over bellowing. Others of us had tumbled, had scrambled up again without a murmur, and had gone on with the sliding. She was different. If she were being murdered in her own gore she couldn't have raised more of a row—and there was no gore seeable.

I wanted to pull her up, but she made herself like lead and wouldn't budge, and just then Uncle Tom shot out into the hall, as if he'd been fired from a cannon, and scurried to the rescue. Half-way in his mad course his

foot slipped and down he went—kerflummux! —measuring his noble length upon the floor. The next moment he was up and had reached Margery in safety; then he gathered his sorrowing niece in his arms, and she buried her face in his shirt front and went on yowling. Now, he'd come down with a thud—and what with that, and the sounds of woe still continuing, the whole inside of the dinner-party was aroused and out everyone hurried into the hall, followed by the terrified servants. I suppose they must have thought it was "battle, murder, sudden death, at the very least," as the verse says, for there was amazingness on each countenance.

The first to advance was the young man who'd taken Miss Sally Day in to dinner and, as he reached the spot where a great hero fell (meaning Uncle Tom), down he went likewise —only more sprawling—and when he tried to get up, which he did by aid of his hands, he found it no easy matter. Uncle Tom actually grinned over Margery's head, though he tried to hide his face in her curls, but I caught him at it, and when he called out, "Easy there, old fellow, the floor seems bewitched," with a lot

of concern in his voice, he didn't take me in. He might be other things, but he wasn't sorry. The doctor, in the meantime, caring for his own skin, and clothes, crawled skilfully around tables and chairs, while the Bishop, undaunted by what he'd seen, began to navigate across the open space.

"What's the matter?" screamed Granny. "Is Margery killed? Can't anyone speak?"

"No, no, Mother, she's all right," Uncle Tom answered, "don't worry."

"There are no bones broken, Mrs. Ronalds." Dr. Grantley called over his shoulder, "just some bumps and bruises. The little maid was more frightened than hurt. There's no cause for alarm, but don't come over here, it isn't safe——"

"Not safe?" echoed Granny. "Pray, what do you mean?" She stared across at the doctor as if he was gibbering crazy, and from him her glance fell to the streaked marble, then she looked at us huddled together at one side like frightened sheep. "Children," she said in the solemnest kind of a voice, "what is the matter? What have you been doing to my hall?"

"It's butter, Janet," Cousin Laura shrieked

before we could speak. "There's the tray yonder, and that trampled stuff in it is your best print butter."

She swung her skirts high and took a step nearer Granny. Instantly a loud, not-going-to-get-through-in-a-hurry jingling burst upon the air, at which sound she tottered unsteadily, uncertain whether to go forward, or back.

"Oh! won't someone drive away that cat —those cats," she begged, "I'm sure I hear bells——"

"Why, they're right on your gown," Miss Sally cried, for she'd caught a glimpse of the tinkling cymbals.

The news of this unpleasant contagiousness was too much for Cousin Laura. She gave one wild screech and toppled against the parrot-nosed lady, who fell back in her turn, crying, "Oh, dear!" rather crossly, though she got the better of her temper the next moment and said, in a sugary sweet voice, that it didn't matter at all, she quite understood poor dear Miss Marbury's upsetting nerves; she'd never liked cats, either.

I grinned. I didn't know what the others did, I'd no thought of them, nor of Granny's

wrath hanging over our heads like that Damo-somebody's sword. I simply couldn't keep my face straight, even though I felt that we were found out all along the line. Suddenly I met Miss Sally's eyes and I saw by the twinkle in them that she was on to our game. Quick as a wink she stooped and caught Cousin Laura's train, passing her hand rapidly along the flounce, then she gave the gown a hearty shake without waking the least tinkle from a bell.

"There's nothing here now, Miss Marbury," she said, as she stood up, "I fancy we've routed Puss pretty effectually." Her voice was very gentle and it soothed Cousin Laura almost as much as her words did, then she looked at me again and—well, I didn't wonder at Uncle Tom very much after that.

The bell scare had caused a momentary lull in Granny's investigations, but we were not to be spared any longer.

"What is the meaning of this?" she asked sharply.

"It was just our Prevention of Dulness in Society Club," Sheila cried, "we couldn't stand the dinner."

The Bishop coughed in his handkerchief—such a spluttery, choking cough I wondered how Mrs. Bishop could look so smiling and unworried; but she only said, quite laudably:

"Well, I declare, the dears—the little dears."

"And is this a shining example of what your club can do?" Granny demanded, pointing majestically at the floor.

"That's butter," Judy faltered; "it was my own origination, so I hope you won't blame the others."

"Butter!" ejaculated Uncle Tom and the other hero in a breath, then they glanced at their clothes and said nothing, though they certainly did look volumes.

Granny motioned to me, and I stepped out from the rest. In my solitariness I felt like a lonely bark tossed on a wide and watery waste, but there was no help for me. I was commanded to speak, and speak I had to. At first my voice sounded very faint in my ears, though, as I went on, it got more used to the silence and grew stronger, especially as Miss Sally leaned forward so I could see her smiling face just behind Granny's frowning one.

Somehow, my heart couldn't help growing lighter; she seemed to understand about the outside of things anyway, and my courage stopped oozing out at my finger-tips directly. I put my shoulders back then, and told the whole story, and I fitted the blame where it rightfully belonged—you'd better believe that! It was all well enough for Judy to say that she was the guilty person, she was not. There was Another! If I—Philip Egerton—hadn't started "Objects," and hadn't described the floor, none of this sliding business would ever have taken place; and we should have remained pattern children that any dinner-party-giving grandmother would have been proud of. So I didn't make mince-meat of the truth, but I let them have it right out from the shoulder. And my! when I came to the end the hall was as still as a church.

Granny was quiet for what seemed a very long time and no one spoke. The Bishop put his handkerchief up to his face, though I didn't hear him cough, and Mrs. Bishop shook her head—not from side to side, which means reproving (as everybody knows!), but just up and down very gently, and her smile grew

sweeter and more far-awayish. Miss Sally's face wore a smile, too, one of the soft kind, while the little, fat old gentleman lost his company grin and was ever so much nicer to look upon. Then the hush was broken by the Parrot-lady murmuring, in a voice that carried to the farthest corner of the hall, "Did you ever?" and immediately there was an unmistakably familiar rustle—without bells.

Granny was roused to action.

In an instant she turned to the servants, who were crowded, grinning around the doorway, and ordered them to fetch druggets!—cloths!!—Anything!!! You can bet, then, that there was racing and chasing through the hall; the emotion young Lochinvar caused when he ran off with the other fellow's girl, was nothing to it. But we weren't allowed to budge; we stood as if rooted to the spot—the six of us, for Uncle Tom had put Margery down—and quickly. Time had dried the maiden's tears (and also a handkerchief), and she clung remorsefully to Judy, though I kept telling her to be an oak—not a vine. Truthfully, we were none of us very oak-like; we couldn't help being droopy, and we got droopier as the minutes

passed. The dinner people stared at us as if we were creatures from another sphere, all the softness was gone from their faces, and they just grinned instead—even to the Bishop.

When the druggets were heaped on the floor, Granny issued a new command—one that filled us all with horror. We were to be carried upstairs to bed. There were to be no more tracks from our wayward feet! It was a moment of deepest deggerydation, but we didn't dare mutiny; we had to submit without a murmur. Still, I couldn't help wondering, as I was borne away heels uppermost by Duke, how they were going to manage about Uncle Tom, and the young man, and the Bishop himself. Their soles were almost as bad as our own.

# CHAPTER XI

## THE LAST STRAW

THE next week was one of lectures, lines, solitary imprisonment for several hours each day—and it was, also, absolutely butterless. Dry bread for breakfast, dinner, and supper; no hard sauce for our pudding (and this was the season for peach roly-poly!), no puddings really, except rice—which we all detest—though, when it isn't the "Poor man's" kind and has a plenteous sprinkling of raisins, and doesn't look shiveringly white, but wears a golden glow (which, from the lack of it, we discovered was caused by something that wasn't for us), it's not half bad.

Still, if we couldn't eat butter we were reminded of it continually in other ways. Not by Granny. She isn't that sort. Except when the hateful term occurred in her preachings she never mentioned it, but Cousin Laura was different—she seemed able to talk of nothing else. You'd have said she had butter on the

brain. And Hannah was just such another with her parts of speech, while Sophy not only jawed about it, but she actually had the nerve to put the real, genuine article on the table several times, only to grab it up the next moment from under our very eyes, with the remark that she was "that absent-minded!" There was torture everywhere and from everyone. You may think, perhaps, that Uncle Tom, being a man—and having been a boy—wouldn't stoop to jump on us in our downfallen state. You are wrong. He used both feet, and was as fond of airing the word as those who knew no better. On one occasion he even made Judy get her Bible and look up Judges V:25, and when she read it out, at his command, he roared so loud that she had to giggle, and her laugh is the infecting kind —we simply couldn't help joining in.

He was very generous with his company that week, appearing at the most unexpected times and never disappearing without peppering us with small shot. One day when we were at dinner he hove in sight with a monstrous bunch of "Butter-and-eggs" which he gave to Sophy, saying that he'd brought it to

garnish our frugal board, as well as to cheer our drooping spirits. She stuck the hideous things into a vase and placed it in the middle of the table, while he went on about them as if they were the most beautiful blossoms he'd ever seen. Then he helped himself to one of the stalks and, shaking it in our faces, spouted out:

"'Tis but a little country flower,
Without a scent, it's true,
Though if it's rank and smells to heaven—
The butter will not do."

After which, he gazed sorrowfully around, declaring that there was no reason why we should keep our noses so persistently in the air. They went a trifle higher, that being the only answer we had for his fooling. We were as solemn as owls—the whole crew of us—except Margery, and she snickered outright. But you can never depend on her—little laughing, crying, backsliding Delegate! She was pretty quickly reduced to order, I can tell you. Uncle Tom stood looking at us gravely for a few moments (and I must say, I never saw anyone whose face could put on

so many differing expressions), then he made us a low bow.

"My honored friends," he said in a shaky voice, as if there were tears in it, "I must bid you a fond farewell. I am not a member of your distinguished club, though it has ever been my aim in life to prevent dulness in society, and I can lay the flattering unction to my soul that there have been times when I've not lived in vain. Many have smiled to see me come, and more have smiled to see me go away. You do not belong to either faction. Thus far I've been unable to dispel the gloom that envelops your youthful brows. You will have none of me. I have mourned with you, but you would not mourn, I have piped to you, but you would not pipe, so we must part. Yet, ere I go, let me ask one simple question: If Margery should take a walk abroad in a bright red cloak and should encounter, upon a lonely, narrow path, an aged and ill-tempered goat, what would happen? What would happen? I pause for a reply."

We kept up a chilling silence, though Jack said afterwards that he could have answered;

he'd heard the conundrum before. For it was nothing but a silly old conundrum that our uncle had doctored up to suit his purpose.

"What!" he cried, clutching his hair as if he were going to pull it out by the roots, "you have no word to say? You are indifferent to the maiden's fate? But no! Methinks you are tongue-tied by the thought of woe, and you wish me to impart the dreadful truth to you. Fortify yourselves. It is this: Margery would turn into a scarlet runner, and the goat would turn to butt her. I once more take my leave."

This is a sample of the way we were pitched into all the time. It was just as if the grown-ups had taken our motto, "A prank a day," and had changed it into "A persecution a day keeps dulness away." They seemed to find no end of fun in it. Well, at least, we didn't let them see that we minded—we were pretty game, and we didn't get mad, either, which was one thing in our favor. Then the last straw came. And it was from Miss Sally.

Toward the close of the week Granny sent

for us and we obeyed the summons, shaking in our boots, and wondering what new punishments were to be showered upon us. But we were soon to know. When we reached the Blue room we found Cousin Laura and Uncle Tom already there, making no attempt to hide their interest in our future fate. Which was pretty low-down of them. Why, they didn't even pretend to bury their grins in a book, the way grown-ups have a trick of doing. Granny signalled me out instantly and pointed to a large package on the table. There was no need to go close to read the subscription in big black letters: "Master Philip Egerton," though I must own that the words danced queerly up and down. I got a bit red and flustrated with eight pairs of eyes, not counting the dogs', gazing for all they were worth, but I didn't muff the knots much, though it did seem forever before they were unfastened and the outer wrappings fell off. Inside, was a big box tied up in white, candy-store paper (you know it anywhere) with yellow ribbons. I tackled the bow like lightning, and the first thing I found was a card with some writing on it, which I read aloud:

"'For Master Philip Egerton and the other Preventers, with Miss Sally's love.'"

All the kids pressed nearer, their eyes like saucers, while Granny gave such a pleased little laugh and Uncle Tom creaked his chair —I knew it was his chair, though I didn't turn around. Off came the paper helter-skelter, and there was the box itself—a fine, glazy yellow. Well, the lid didn't stay on long, you can bet, though for one moment I paused at the flummery lace business on top and the pair of nippers (give me fingers every time!), the next I had swept that rubbish away and then, from the six of us—as if we had only one brain to think with, and only one tongue to speak with—a single word burst upon the air.

"Buttercups!"

That's the way Miss Sally had the laugh on us. Buttercups—buttercups—everywhere. Not the simple flowers of the field by which you find out if a person cares for butter, or not, but the far better kind the candy-store people make. There they were before us in their different colors, and Solomon in all his glory couldn't come up to their gorgeousness. Brown, pink, green, violet, white, blue, yellow

—such quantities of them—such quantities! The box was a ten-pounder. After our first surprise had cooled down we stood gloating over our treasures. Buttercups do not melt in the mouth, being of a more lasting, crunchable nature, but I've never seen the boy or girl yet who couldn't make away with a lot. Fig-filled, fruit-filled, cream-filled, nut-filled, they're pretty bully eating, and Miss Sally knew what she was about. We didn't mind such persecuting as hers!

I carried the box right over to Granny for her to have the first pick—and suddenly the prettiest little rosy glow went racing all over her face, even up to her hair, and her eyes got wet—though they were smiling, too. But she didn't speak, nor make the least motion to take any candies. Cousin Laura gave a short cough.

"They will keep," she said solemnly.

And then I understood. It was just another way of saying, "Be firm!"

I gritted my teeth so a certain sound wouldn't get through. On the instant the box seemed to weigh a ton, I could scarcely hold it. And the room was so queerly quiet. Back

of me there was a little stir among the Preventers, and a low "ah!" like the rustle a baby breeze makes among the leaves, though it was so faint and so quickly over, it was almost as if it hadn't been. Uncle Tom's chair creaked loudly—and then the silence grew. Somehow, I felt like that tantalized fellow in the Greek story-book, the one who has the water just out of reach of his lips—and him dying of thirst —and the lovely branches of fruit above his head that slip beyond the grasp of his fingers the moment he tries to pick any. It wouldn't have been quite so hard if the Buttercups had been on the table; but to have them so near was too much—too screw-turningly much for humane nature to endure. If this was part of Miss Sally's joke, I hated her for it. It was the most unkindest cut of all.

"Perhaps," said Cousin Laura in a very queer voice, "this is the last day——"

"The last minute," cried Granny with sudden energy. Then she took me—box and all —into her grandmotherly arms. It was a little bad for the buttercups, but the Delegates went down on their hands and knees before Shadow and Liberty could cut in; and what's

more, though they got up with their fists full, they dumped the whole lot back into the box.

It's a strange thing that grown-ups don't care much for candy, though you may be ever so pressing. Granny would only take two buttercups, and Cousin Laura was satisfied with three. She really seemed satisfied and more smiling than I'd ever seen her; even when she refused my continuous offers she couldn't have been politer if I'd been Dr. Grantley himself. Uncle Tom wouldn't have any at all, though we circulated the box frequentious in his direction; he was puffing away like fury at his cigarette. Then we kids sailed in, not for lady-like twos and threes, thank you, but much more humanly, and we stood around munching and crunching, at peace with all the world.

Presently Granny told us that she'd quite forgiven the butter episode, though it had been a wicked prank on our part, and might have resulted most seriously. As matters had turned out only the floor had suffered, and we ought to feel very grateful that no harm had befallen Margery, or Uncle Tom, or Mr. Dudley, for each had had a miraculous escape. And she went on to say that one doesn't have to go

abroad to meet with grave accidents, they often occur right in one's own home; people have broken their arms, or legs, or injured their spines unrecoverishly, just in slipping on the floor, or tumbling down a step or two (the duffers).

Her voice was so solemn that suddenly we saw ourselves almost murderers. Folks have died of broken legs ere now, yet we had truthfully meant no harm. We'd only thought of the fun, but—as the proverb says—one man's meat will disagree with another, and you never can tell how things will turn out, nor what direful consequences will come trailing after. The picture of the slain that might have been heaped at our very doors made us look so dismal that Granny ordered us to cheer up at once. With one accord we began to grin, though not for long; the next we knew, she asked us to promise not to play any more pranks. That was a floorer! One of the sacredest things in our family, and in Jack's, too, for he is a branch, is a promise. It's something all the king's horses and all the king's men cannot make you break. We didn't want to anger Granny again when she'd just for-

given us for a black, though unthinking, deed, but of course we couldn't do as she wished. How could we say that we wouldn't ever—ever—play pranks again, when we were we? It was impossible. Not one of us spoke.

Granny saw the difficulty in a flash—sometimes she is quite surprisingly quick—and she wasn't a mite mad. She actually begged our pardons for making such a demand. She said it wasn't reasonable, and she realized as we did—that a promise must be faithfully kept; so she would only ask us to be considerate of others, and not to play tricks that might hurt them in their bodies, or in their feelings. She wanted us to have as much sport as possible, but it must be fair sport—she left that to our honor—and she finished up by saying, "'a little nonsense, now and then, is relished by the wisest men.'"

We huzzaed when she got through fit to raise the roof, then, as soon as we were quiet again, I asked if we might go and give the servants some of our candy, and she just nodded her head—quick, up-and-down nods—her eyes very sweet and smiling. We cleared out instanter, going first to find Hannah; then we

bore down on the kitchen and from there we went out to the stables, where the men were tremendously glad to see us. While we were sitting around, as happy as clams, Judy suddenly cried out that we'd forgotten poor Duke, so back we trailed to the house—with all the dogs (they were as near as brothers and sisters, nearer—really—and more demanding). The box, by this time, was much lighter, though the bottom was still a long ways from being seen. Duke was in his pantry with the blue Shakespeare propped open on the shelf, but he didn't hear us on account of the noise he was making as he ramped up and down crying:

"'Is dis yer a dagger dat I see befo' me
De han'le to'ards my han'?
Come, let me clutch thee—'"

At this junction I poked the box forward and his groping fingers came bang up against it, spilling out a shower of candies for which Delegates and dogs made a grand rush. In the scrimmage Duke toppled back, frightened half out of his seven senses, though he got himself together quickly and aimed a blow at Liberty, who scampered to his usual shelter in Judy's arms. I held out the box again to quiet Duke's noble wrath, and his brow cleared

right off when he saw that we'd come in peace, and not in war. He stretched out his hand to help himself—we'd earlier thrown away those silly nippers, though now we regretted our rash act.

"'Sweets ter de sweets,'" he cried, as he raked them in, then he added, "but stay! I'll take a libbuty, which I hopes old Marse Shakespeare will excuse, en say instid, sweets from de sweet, 'en damned be him that fust cries, "hol', enuff!"'"

We fell back in sheer amazedness, all but Sheila, and she grabbed his arm between her two hands, though honestly she wasn't thinking of the buttercups at all.

"Oh, Duke!" she gasped in a voice of horror, "Granny doesn't allow that—and you know it."

Duke looked down at her, and understanding broke slowly o'er his face.

"Well, ole Miss will hab ter settle dat wid ole Marse Shakespeare," he chuckled, "I ain' ter blame fer dose words, honey. Dat's w'at dey call a poet's licunse. But bless yo' butious orbs, lil' lady, I'd no idee I'd done robbed you so. 'Take oh! take dose sweets erway!'"

We said very politely that he was welcome

to all he wanted, we were no Injun-givers, but he declared he hadn't noticed what he was doing; so we let him put back a handful and liked him the better for it. Then we decamped and, as we went, we heard him mutter to himself: "'Hit is de cause—hit is de cause, my soul.'"

After leaving him we went around to the side veranda. Granny and Cousin Laura had gone driving, and we wanted to talk over things at our ease; but Uncle Tom was sitting there all by his lonely. He'd given over smoking, and when we offered the candy again he seemed to have changed his mind, for he put his fist right into the box. The next moment he drew it out, crying:

"Hullo! what's this?"

We gathered close about him; it was such a day of surprises. He was holding a little wad of white tissue paper between his fingers which he tossed straightway to me. I tore it open quicker than you could say Jack R., and there lay four shiny brass bells.

"Now what in time——" began Uncle Tom.

"Mum's the word," cried Gilbert warningly.

But even as he spoke the Talking Delegate

hunched up her shoulders and shrieked out in a voice that was exactly like a certain familiar one: "O-oh! won't somebody drive away that cat—those cats?"

"Mum!" cautioned Judy.

Too late!

"You little villains," roared Uncle Tom. Then he rocked backward and forward with his hand on his side. "Well, this beats me," he went on, "'this is raythe too rich, as Sam Weller said the Young Lady told the Pastry Cook, when he gave her a Pork Pie as was all fat.' You little villains!"

"Mum?" begged Judy.

"Cut me in two, I won't," he giggled, when he could get his breath.

So you see what a really nice fellow he was after all. We knew we could trust him through thick and thin; our secret was absolutely safe in his keeping. Later that same afternoon when he and I were together—the others had gone off somewhere, all but Larry who was at my feet—Uncle Tom looked over at me.

"Sally's no end of a trump, isn't she?" he demanded.

"Miss Sally," I said, for I knew what was manners.

"Well, Miss Sally then," he returned, with a laugh that was half ashamed, and half a jumble of masterfulness and conceit, "but not for long if I can help it."

I pulled out Larry's silky ears two or three times in silence.

"Ah! she'll have something to say about that," I hinted at last, just to take the wind out of his sails.

He stared at me, his face growing very grave and thoughtful; it was earnester that way, and I liked it better, somehow, than when he was grinning and carrying on. After a moment he said, with a little unsteady laugh which was different from his other one—and far nicer:

"You're right, she will have something to say about it—all, really, but I hope you'll speak a good word for me. Won't you, old fellow?"

I held out my hand and we shook on the spot.

"You bet," I cried.

## CHAPTER XII

### AN AFTERNOON CALL

We were taken back into favor at the time of the Feast of the Buttercups, though whenever the six of us were gathered together—talking of nothing in particular, I give you my word for it—people looked at us suspiciously as if they thought we were up to fresh mischief, and they wondered if they'd be lucky enough to escape from our clutches. Even if we'd wanted to play a prank it would have been almost impossible. But we'd had enough of pranks just then, and had lost some of the bold and glowing spirits of born Preventers.

All this ought to have been seen by those around us, instead of which, whatever happened—no matter if we were innocent and could prove it, too—it was placed to our credit. If Hannah's spectacles were pushed back in her hair, as happened forty 'leven times a day, her first cry was: "Drat those children!" And in one form, or another, we were dratted

throughout the entire household. Brooms missing, scissors mislaid, horses lame, chicken with the pip—anything!—we were to blame. But it really was a little too hard when Danby's hay fever appeared as usual that he should declare we were scattering pepper around—a thing we hadn't dreamed of! He lay in wait for Jack and me, and we had to struggle long and prayerfully with him before he would believe us and let us go.

So you see there was nothing left for us to do but to live down the base and evil reports which were not confined to Uplands alone. They'd crept out, somehow, beyond the gates, as we found whene'er we took our walks abroad; everywhere people stared at us as if we belonged to a travelling circus. We often overheard remarks, too, about Terrors, and Cautions, and Et Ceteras. These last—these Et Ceteras—let me tell you, were most dreadful, and Judy said she was glad for the only moment in her life that Manila was so far away. This living-down business was far from easy, still we meant to carry it through, or know the reason why.

One of the first things we did to prove that

we'd really turned over a new leaf was to go to see Miss Sally. We wanted to thank her for the buttercups and it seemed more interesting to go to her house than to write a stupid letter. Granny let us have our choice, and only two voices were for writing, so the feet carried it. At least we supposed they had, but when the time for starting came the omnibus was at the door and we saw with delight that we were to drive over to Boxwood—the Days' place. This was much better than we'd expected, and we didn't let the cautions that Granny and Cousin Laura showered upon us weigh down our gay and soaring spirits. Of course we wouldn't disgrace them. What did they take us for? We wouldn't loll in our chairs, or grin, or giggle senselessly, or monopolize the conversation; we would just keep in mind all the while that we were making an afternoon call. And it wasn't necessary for Cousin Laura to tell us over and over to contort ourselves with dignity, as she always did. That was just what we meant to do. I met Uncle Tom's eye as we started, and let him see that I wouldn't forget the promise I'd made him a few days before. He looked as if he wished he

was going along, too, but we'd begged that there should be no taggers, and as it was our own affair, Granny said we might do as we pleased. So we waved a friendly farewell to our watching relations, William, who was driving, cracked his whip, and off we went at a lively pace.

Just outside the gates we were held up by two desperate ruffians as the coaches used to be in ye olden times. All unexpectedly Shadow and Liberty made a dash from the shrubbery with a great yowl of "Stand, and let us enter!" How long they'd been waiting for us, no one knew, but of course they came off victorious. It takes a pretty cold-blooded heart of stone to resist a dog's wishful, begging eyes, and William had nothing to say in the matter, as we soon pointed out to him. Granny hadn't said the dogs shouldn't go, she hadn't said anything about them; but she knew it was a thankful expedition, and Shadow and Liberty had had more than their share of the candies, so if they wanted to remember their manners, they were to be encouraged, not frowned upon. In the end William had to listen to the voices of reason, and in the dogs scrambled. They walked

all over us in their joy, and sat first on one and then on another; they were what Cousin Laura calls Perpetual commotion, but we couldn't be mad at them. They felt, with us, that it was a grand thing to be making afternoon calls and their spirits bubbled over. William looked as if he were having the time of his life and kept his head over his shoulder, grinning the whole way. We didn't mind; we were glad to let the simple man hear what we intended to say and do. I don't suppose he'd many chances of knowing how folks disported themselves in real society.

As we turned into Boxwood, however, our racket died down—like a wind at even—and we glanced at one another fearfully and grew still—stiller—with each passing moment. The girls tried to iron their gowns with anxious pats. They'd been martyrs to the paws and they showed it, too, in lots of unsmooth-outable creases; we fellows had come off better, but we pulled up our collars, put on company smirks, and sat as straight as rulers. As for the dogs they got kinder green and yallery with solemnness, while William's eyes became glued to the horses' ears. So we dashed up the

drive, stopping in great style at the house, and then we saw a sight that froze the marrow in our veins, and made our hearts cease from beating. The veranda was full of people.

And I had to get out first—I had to! I couldn't order William to drive on—to keep on driving—we liked that better. We had reached our journey's end, and I had to get out. I don't know how I ever did it, but I think Judy's pokes gave me the first start and perhaps Miss Sally's smiling face helped, too; she'd run quickly down to the omnibus steps and stood there calling gaily to us. I floundered somehow to the ground and wrung her hand as if it were a pump-handle, then I turned to make the others hurry and suddenly it seemed as if there were a million of them. They kept coming, and coming—boys, and girls, and dogs—dogs, and girls, and boys—until I thought there would never be any end to them. Miss Sally didn't appear to see anything unusual, but as soon as they were all out and standing huddled together like sheep about to be butchered, she kissed the girls, and shook hands with Jack and Gilbert. Then William drove off with a light and careless

air and we joined the assemblage assembled on the veranda.

Mrs. Day gave us a finger to shake; she also said she was glad to see us in a voice that didn't have any back-bone to it. She didn't take us in by a long shot, though her face did wear a ready-to-order smile. After welcoming us, she went back to a group of visiting ladies and began to talk low and wag her head —you know how. It wasn't hard to guess what she was driving at, especially as a moment later one of the visitors called to two flabby little imps and made them sit close to her side, where they stared unpolitely at us. Four or five younger ladies were standing chattering to some young men—Mr. Dudley, who'd come a cropper on our hall floor, being of the number. He glared fiercely at us, which did but prove that he hadn't forgiven and forgotten. Some people are like that—they remember bruises entirely too long! There were also two white-haired gentlemen present, who winked at me in friendly fashion. I was for returning the wink with a compound one, when the agedest prodded my ribs and asked, with a fat chuckle, if butter was still in the market.

So I knew that if they were all strangers to us we were not unknown to them—and I was dumb.

We sat down on near-by chairs, we boys in a row with Judy next to Gilbert, and we didn't loll—not one of us—we sat quite far forward, very bolt upright, and comfort wasn't in our looks, nor in our bodies. Nor did we speak; all the fine things we had planned to say had flown to the winds. Miss Sally had to take care of the grown-ups, so we didn't blame her because she didn't talk to us. At least there was no sting of remembering in her eyes; she was just as pleased as she could be at our coming and showed it, too, whenever she looked our way. If she'd been all by herself, we'd have had a bully time.

Distinctly we didn't enjoy afternoon calls! We wished ourselves anywhere else but where we were; that is, we fellows and Judy did—the Delegates were quite unbowed down with the weight of awfulness and seemed to be having the time of their lives, giggling and chattering with unfeeling strangers. Then cake and lemonade hove in sight and immediately the four of us felt better. Not that we were fam-

ished; we weren't; but we were a bit dry, though the dryness was not from thirst alone. The real reason of our chirking up was that we had discovered the painful truth that empty hands are dreadfully big and hard to manage at an afternoon call. Besides, if you're busy eating and drinking, you can't be expected to talk and smirk at the same time, if you've been well brought up. So we took what was offered to us in a grateful spirit—and down swooped ill-luck without any warning. The first thing that idiot of a Gilbert did was to spill the liquid fluid—kerswish!—over himself, which mattered little, and over the chair-cushion—which mattered more. Judy leaned forward, as soon as she saw what had happened, to sop up the mess with her handkerchief, dropping her cake on the floor as she did so, and instantly Shadow and Liberty, who'd been huddled against us looking like saints, scrambled snarlingly head over heels to see which would get it first. It sounded like the most blood-curdling dog-fight imaginable, which it wasn't—but only a little way they have at times which is startling, when you don't know their really heavenly dispositions. The lady with the children gave a

sky-reaching shriek and stretched out motherly arms, into which one of the kids took a header, while the other, with a tremendous yowl, scuttled behind her chair. Some of the other ladies —Miss Sally's mother among them—uttered loud cries and, to add to the hullabaloo, there was a lot of laughter, especially from the rib-poking old gentleman.

Quick as a wink Jack cuffed the scrappers apart, and peace was just folding her snowy wings about us all again when Judy, sitting back with a very red face, knocked over her glass and shivered it to smithereens. The awfullest moment followed. No one spoke; no one stirred; no one seemed to breathe even. The hush everywhere was terrible. Then the kid behind the protective lady's chair giggled outright, though I speedily reduced him to a pulp with an angry glare, and Mr. Dudley said, in a voice which he didn't try to make low:

"Butter-fingered, as I live!"

The next second Miss Sally's glass lay shattered to bits on the floor at her feet. Upon my word, I saw her topple it over myself on purpose—I saw it with my very own two eyes, though I don't think anyone else did. It

went down with a louder crash than Judy's had made, and she cried quite clearly so she could be heard everywhere:

"Butter-fingered, too, you see! Well, accidents are always pardonable, for they aren't intentional. Judy dear, you and I are in the same boat so you must love me a little—won't you?"

She came over to us as she spoke and put her arms around poor Judy, and kissed her before everybody. You can bet she was a number one! And pretty—H-m-m-m! She'd seemed a regular peach the other night in her party toggery, but she couldn't hold a candle then to the way she looked this afternoon in her white gown, with her head held high, the red coming and going in her cheeks where the dimples showed in just the very right place, and her eyes full of softness, although there was a fighting glint in them besides. Judy snuggled close to her and seemed easy in her mind at once, with never a thought to give to such trifles as broken glasses.

And now I want to tell you what happened, though you may not believe it—but it's as true as true—I give you my sacred word of

honor. That cad of a Mr. Dudley walked right across the veranda, in the eyes of the staring multitude, right spang across and up to where Miss Sally and Judy were standing together. When he reached them—he made a low bow to my sister, just as if she were a grown-up young lady, and he said in a voice which wasn't loud, but which carried so no one lost the least syllable:

"Miss Judy, I beg your pardon, I spoke without thinking."

Judy gave a funny little cry and stood up quite straight, stretching out her hand to him. It was shaking a bit.

"O-oh! oh! please," she stammered, "I really *was* clumsy, only—somehow—things had been so upsetting I couldn't help it. But you're awfully nice to ask my pardon, and I forgive you from the deepest depths of my heart, and—and I like you very much."

Miss Sally laughed.

"We're three good friends now," she murmured softly. "All's well that ends well."

I liked that man Dudley. I liked the way he talked to Judy after that, in a sensible, hu-

mane fashion as if she were a being with thoughts; and I liked him most of all for owning up before the grinning populace that he was sorry he'd hurt a little girl's feelings. I let him see how I felt on the subject, for I put a lot of ginger in my handshake when we went away, which happened a few minutes later. Granny had given William orders to call for us in a half hour's time, so the moment he drove up to the door I remembered and got to my feet, though she'd also said that we might stay a little longer if Miss Sally and her mother urged us.

They did; they were quite urging, Miss Sally especially. But, though things were a bit better than at first, I said politely that we must be off; so we got the farewells over and climbed into the omnibus. That was about the pleasantest, freest-breathed moment I'd known for a long while, and another deeper-breathed one came when the wheels turned and we called good-by, and waved our hands, as the people on the veranda were doing. The shouting feeling was strong within us, but Judy hushed us up instanter, because she said the people would think we were glad to go—which,

of course, was true, and we knew they knew it—only in society you have to keep such things hidden away. I don't see where she'd learned so much, for she is a most unsocietyish person herself; however, we stopped at once and began jabbering about our own affairs.

In the midst of the hubbub I fell silent. We'd passed through the gates of Boxwood and were out on the highroad, which was cool and sweet, now that the sun was almost down, and the horses were pounding away at their jolly, home-going tune, and the wheels—As true as you live, I could only make out a certain set of words, the same ones over and over: "You promised—you promised on your honor—you said you would." Then they began again: "You promised . . ." I stared at the grass and the trees, though all I could see was Uncle Tom's face, very quiet and resolveful, as it had looked the afternoon he'd asked me if I would speak a good word for him. And I hadn't said a single thing—I'd been false to my trust. What was more, I'd bidden a long farewell to Opportunity, as the copybook says; it was out of my reach. I might never—never—have the chance of being with

Miss Sally again, certainly not at an afternoon call if I could well help myself—and any other meeting with her seemed too impossible to think of. I sat staring gloomily out of my window, while the wheels kept up such a racket I wondered that the others didn't hear them.

Then, in an instant, I made up my mind. Though I'd been false to my trust, that was no reason why I should stay so. I shouted wildly to William to stop, and he pulled up the horses with a suddenness that upset Shadow and Liberty, who were perambulating around from lap to lap as usual, and their barks, mingling with human surprise, made no end of a row. Under cover of this noise I jumped to the ground.

"I've forgotten something," I declared boldly, "I've got to go back."

For a long minute there wasn't a breath anywhere, then the bedlam broke loose: "Your hat?" "Your handkerchief?" "What is it?" "Let it stay." "Don't put your head into the lion's mouth again" (this from Gilbert). "Don't be a fool" (this from Jack). And "Oh! Phil, must you" (from Judy), "must you really? Then we'll all go back, too."

But I wouldn't have that, and said so. Firmly. It was my own affair. I ordered William to drive on and he, being a man of sense, agreed with me that it was his duty; Granny would be worried if he didn't get back within a certain time. So we parted—the wondering Preventers going in one direction, and I facing another. I stood waiting a few moments, listening to the wheels rolling out the same old tune, then as the sounds grew fainter I started about my own business. At first I ran. When you're alone and your courage is sort of weak at the knees, that's the best thing to do, otherwise—if you lag, or stand still—you'll find it hard to get a move. Running puts you in a glow—outside and in. I was a good distance, too, from Boxwood, so there could be no dilly-dallying. After a bit I settled into a steady dog-trot, trying not to think of anything but my promise, and before I knew it the gates were just before me. Then suddenly I felt so very lonely—and queer. The only wish I had was to get to Uplands as fast as ever I could. I half turned in its direction, but my legs weren't traitors—they wouldn't go. It was right-about-face in a jiffy, I can

tell you! I set my teeth hard, drove my fists well into my pockets, and started up the drive, my heart going like a sledge-hammer against my jacket—pound, pound, pound.

The road seemed to be made of India rubber, it was so stretchable—my steps hardly counted at all, yet I kept pegging on. Presently above the sounds I carried with me I heard the hum of voices and laughter. The house was just at hand. But I didn't care. If the whole world had been staring, and poking fun at me, I wouldn't have gone back. I could see things more clearly, too, which was good. The lawn was dotted with people and I soon caught sight of two familiar figures walking together. I stumbled across the grass, calling as I went.

"Why, it's Phil," Miss Sally cried, hurrying toward me. "What is it—has there been an accident?"

"I forgot something," I stammered, "something I wanted to tell you. Its very particularly private."

Mr. Dudley met my eye and nodded a bit stiffly, moving at once out of ear-shot—he's a gentleman through and through. Then Miss

Sally put her hand on my shoulder; *she,* at least, didn't look vexed.

"Well?" she asked with a little smile, for I found it pretty hard to begin.

"It's just this," I blurted out, keeping my eyes on hers, "I wanted to tell you what a real good fellow my Uncle Tom is; there are two sides to him, one all fun and bubble, the other steady, and sure, and as true as steel. And square!—he's one of the squarest men I know. You ought to see him with the dogs; they take a person's measure in a flash, and they'd tell you he's all right if you understood their language. He's no end kind, too. Only last week we found a little bird that had broken its wing and he set it as gentle as gentle; and ever since he's looked after the bird—its own mother couldn't have been considerater."

"Yes," said Miss Sally very softly, as I paused for breath, but she wasn't laughing, "yes?"

"You see I told him I'd say a good word for him," I went on, and instantly I felt her fingers stiffen on my shoulder as if she were surprised. "So that's why I came back, because I hadn't done it; I felt you ought to

know wnat he really is on his stay-at-home-just-with-his-own-family side."

Miss Sally stood staring at me, her face full of assorted looks, not so much smiling ones—as others.

"You're very loyal, Phil," she said after a moment.

"But I almost forgot," I interrupted, "and when we came away this afternoon I let him understand that I'd remember the promise I made him the other day. Oh! do you want to know about that? Well, it was after the buttercups came; Uncle Tom was the one to find the bells—that was the first inkling he had about that prank; and later, when he and I were by ourselves, he said, 'Sally's a trump, isn't she?' Yes, I started—just the way you're doing now, and I told him he ought to say Miss Sally—it was politer. Then he laughed, and said all right, but it shouldn't be Miss Sally long if he could help it, and I pointed out to him that you would have to decide that. I wish you could have seen his face, it was so earnest, and so—so speaking—he agreed, too, oh! quite solemn-like that it would all depend on you, but he hoped I'd help matters along by saying a

good word for him. And he meant it—really, out of the deepness of his heart. So I gave him my promise on the spot. That's all. Now, I must go."

Miss Sally put her finger under my chin and tipped it up, looking straight into my eyes; she was kinder red, but it didn't seem the mad sort.

"Where are the others?" she asked.

"I made them go on for fear of worrying Granny," I answered. "This was Uncle Tom's affair and mine—they don't know about it. I left them at the Silvertons'——"

"What," she interrupted, "you came all that distance—you dear boy——" she stopped suddenly, and her hand closed over mine with a very understanding grip.

"Oh! it wasn't anything of a walk," I said. "I didn't mind it a bit—I should have minded much more the not telling. Good-by."

"Good-by," she repeated softly, then she stooped and whispered something in my ear.

I started off after that, and as I reached the drive I looked around; Mr. Dudley had joined her, but before they moved away she

waved her hand to me. I hurried my steps then, pelting along through the gates and out into the highroad, on and on. It was kinder lonesome. The air had grown a bit coolish, for the sun had gone, though the sky was still bright with goldeny pink clouds far up the west, but it would be quite dark—I knew—before I could reach Uplands. There was no helping that, however, and even if I had to go supperless to bed I shouldn't regret the turning back. I'd have been pretty mean if I hadn't done it. I fell to whistling and singing at the top of my lungs to forget my solitariness and the noise I made drowned the sounds of approaching wheels; the first I knew a dog-cart almost ran me down.

"Hullo, Phil!" Uncle Tom shouted, drawing up, "they said you had to go back, so I came on after you."

If he was disappointed that he didn't have to go all the way he didn't say so, but after I'd scrambled up he turned around, setting the horse off at a spanking pace; also, if he was curious as to my errand he was too polite to hint a question. I told him the whole of it

immediately, and he heard me through from start to finish without a word; then he slowed up, whistling softly.

"Hmm! that finishes me," I heard him say under his breath; the next moment his hand shot out cordially, and he cried, "You're a brick, Phil."

"So's the other fellow," I returned.

"What other fellow?" he asked with a grin. "Your humble?"

"No, old man Dudley," I answered. Then I gave him an ungarnished account of what had happened that afternoon. As before, he listened without interrupting, but as soon as I'd finished he said—and this is part of his squareness and fairness:

"You're right, Phil, he is a brick." He was quiet for a little while; we were not moving, but had stopped in the centre of the darkening road. "Do you think she thinks so, too?" he asked. "Sally, I mean."

I didn't correct his lack of manners.

"Yes," I replied slowly, "she truly looked it."

He leaned forward and gave the horse a sharp cut with his whip, then—as the cart

lurched from side to side—he settled himself firmly in his seat.

"It's getting late, my young friend," he said, with his eyes straight ahead of him, "we must be jogging on."

"Miss Sally—told me," I gasped, speaking in jerks and rather loudly, for the horse and wheels were making no end of a racket, "she told—me to tell—you—to—take—warning—by—Miles—somebody—or—other———"

The cart came to a sudden standstill and I had to clutch the wood at the side to keep from pitching forward on my head.

"The———" he cried.

No, I am really not going to repeat what he said—it is not allowable on youthful lips. Gilbert had his mouth washed out once with soap for using the same improper name. Uncle Tom recovered himself quickly.

"She did, did she?" he cried with open joy, flipping up the horse again, but quite gently this time. "I say, Phil, you're no end of a trump, you'll dine with me to-night, old fellow—yes, I'll insist upon Granny's letting you."

I squared my shoulders and sat well back in my place, though I didn't say anything just

then; we rode on in silence, each one busy with his thoughts, as the poem says.

"Who was Miles?" I asked, with high-beating heart as we entered Uplands' gates.

"Miles Standish," Uncle Tom laughed, "of Plymouth days—you've not forgotten him, I'll warrant. A plain, blunt soldier who ought to have remembered the adage that when you want a thing done, you yourself are the best person to do it."

"Oh, I see," I cried thoughtfully, "then that's what Miss Sally meant——"

"Yes," he answered, "that's what she meant," and a moment later he added softly under his breath: "God bless her!"

## CHAPTER XIII

### WITH THE IMPROVERS

Uncle Tom had bound me by no oath of secrecy, though I think that was because he knew his man and knew, too, that he was to be trusted through thick and thin. The Preventers were mighty keen to find out why I'd gone back to Boxwood, but I put them off by saying I'd forgotten to tell Miss Sally something—which was true. They had to be satisfied with that. Judy looked as if she was just dying to know what it was, but when I let her see by my manner that the secret wasn't my own, she understood why my lips were forever sealed. We're pretty open with each other—she and I—and always mean to be, still this wasn't my affair. I had to keep quiet.

The next morning when we were all under the Council Tree Uncle Tom rode by looking so strong and handsome, as he waved to us, that it seemed as if he'd ridden right out of the days of Chivalry. After he'd passed some of

the Preventers began to wonder where he was going, guessing this place and that in a light and senseless way. I didn't need to *guess*. Boxwood was written all over him from top to toe, only if you think I let on—you are wrong. And yet, when I glanced up the next moment, Judy stared me squarely in the face and mouthed two words: Miss Sally. Then she giggled.

I kept by myself all morning, leaving the others to do what they pleased, for when a secret is just new you don't take much interest in every-day matters. Judy, Jack, and Gilbert went off somewheres with the dogs, and the Delegates—of all things in the world—played at making calls. They togged themselves out in some old grown-up clothes and trotted about the house visiting this person and that. I was sitting on the side veranda reading when they trailed by, with all their airs and graces, on their way to Duke's pantry, and from the rumblings that soon arose upon the calm summer breeze I knew he was spouting away as usual. Presently, just as I'd got deep in my book, there was a clatter of hoofs on the drive and a horseman dashed past, keeping right on to

the stables without a halt of any kind. I peered after the retreating figure—the way they aldays do in books, and could scarcely believe my eyes. It was Uncle Tom—back long before he ought to have been. As soon as I could get over my surprise I set out to meet him, though I needn't have bothered about hurrying. Half-way to the house he'd stopped to look at the view—the same old view that's always been there—and was so busy studying it that I had to cough twice before he took the slightest notice of me. He glanced around then with a start and tried to grin, though I saw at once that his was not a grinning mood.

"Hullo, kid," he cried, looking off again, "fine prospect that—fine!"

Well, there wasn't anything for a fellow to say to such a silly remark so I kept still, and pretty soon he turned and met my eye.

"She's gone," he said gloomily.

I fell back in sheer bewilderment, staring for all I was worth; after a bit I dumbly mouthed two words, as Judy had done earlier.

"Yes, Miss Sally," he cried impatiently, "she went away this morning on the eight o'clock train."

"Then she didn't mean the first thing," I stammered, "she was just fooling us—I didn't think it of her."

Uncle Tom switched savagely at a bush with his crop, clipping off some leaves neatly.

"I don't," he declared at last, "I wont think it of her. Tell me again what she said."

I obeyed. And in the next ten days I repeated the words very often; he seemed never to tire of hearing them. Of course he'd been pretty well bowled over by Miss Sally's running away, but he didn't go around as if he'd lost his last friend—not he! He rode, and drove, and played tennis, and larked with us all, and was just as usual, except that he wrote a good many letters and he did show an uncommon interest in the mail-bag whenever it arrived. Finally, one afternoon, he took me aside and said that his stay had come to an end. I dare say I looked a little dashed, we'd grown such friends; and though I'd known all along that school was glooming in the near future for me, I hadn't thought he'd be the first to leave.

"Well," I said forlornly, "summer is over and there's nothing but dreariness coming——"

He shook me by the shoulder forcefully, yet not ungently.

"You villain," he cried, "Miles Standish is going on his own errand."

And then I understood. And after we'd talked for a while, though he didn't say much, he let me have a peep at the postscript of a certain letter. It ran like this: "Give my dear love to Philip."

He went away in the morning, so early that Cousin Laura had to bid him good-by the night before—for she couldn't get up at such heathenish hours, she said. But Granny came out on the stair landing in her wrapper and kissed him, and told him to take care of himself, and not to jump on, or off, a moving train, and to be sure to write the very first thing—just as if he were ten, instead of almost three times that age. I suppose mothers are always like that; their boys never really grow up to them. Of course we wouldn't let a valued friend depart without seeing him off, so we were downstairs before he was, and when he joined us we found that Granny had ordered breakfast for the entire crew and Duke was on hand, because he never would let anyone else

serve Uncle Tom. It was a regular jubilee from start to finish, with Duke the life of the whole party. All too soon the trap drove up to the door, the good-bys were spoken, Granny screamed the last parting conjunctions, and then we were left staring mournfully at one another while the carriage vanished in the distance.

We mooned around almost the entire day. It was pretty dreary outside, for it began to storm before noon, and it was much drearier within-doors. Things fell so flat, somehow. It didn't seem possible that Uncle Tom's going could have made all that difference, and we were ready to blame the weather. Yet rain had never made us so droopy, nor so hard to please before. After dinner our lowness got worse, and we were glad enough when Granny sent for us to cheer up Cousin Laura and herself. Judy said she rather thought Granny had a lump-in-her-throat feeling, such as we knew about, and we ought to do what we could to make matters jolly. So we just put our shoulders to the wheel and everyone felt better immediately. Granny brightened right up, and

when Gilbert gave his hen imitation she laughed fit to kill, while Cousin Laura insisted on his doing it again, which so tickled the noble doer that after the performance he stood on his head and not one reproving word was uttered. We parted quite light-heartedly for the night, very proud in our own minds that we'd been true Preventers of Dulness.

The rain had settled down with a vengeance as we discovered next morning, and Granny's orders were that the girls should not go out; we boys might do as we chose, though she preferred to have us remain in-doors. The first part of her remarks was permission enough and I'd have been off instanter, if it hadn't been for Judy's eyes which said "Stay," though her lips wore a real brave, go-if-you-want-to smile. Besides, the big calendar in the schoolroom told a certain truth, rather plainly, and that helped me to understand what she was bothering about. If we fellows went off swishing through the rain, with the dash of it in our faces, and the nice smell of the wet all around, the Delegates wouldn't give us a thought, they'd be so busy with their dolls. But

Judy would be out of it, somehow, thinking of the call of the damp air and—other things. All in a moment I made up my mind.

"Oh, well," I said, "I'm for staying in, it's too sozzling outside."

"Anyone would think you were made of 'sugar and spice, and all that's nice,'" began Gilbert.

"Anyone would know *you* weren't," I retorted. "But go if you like—and Jack, too, he's his own master. What, old man, you mean to stay? That's bully. Now then, Judy, you've got to tell us what to do."

Judy laughed such a ringing, happy laugh that it cleared Gilbert right out of the sulks and set him staring at her, and her face did look so beamy.

"Of course I'll stay, too," he mumbled, "anything to oblige, I'm sure. Fire ahead, Jude."

"Shall it be Pranks?" she asked anxiously. "Not that I can think of anything new, but we might jumble up the list, draw helter-skelter and make a combination. Or—or——" she faltered, "suppose we play something quieter, something——" she had to stop again.

"Suppose we just have a club like Granny's improving one," she finished all in a breath.

Jack chortled with glee, I hovered undecided between a sniff and a snicker, and Gilbert groaned outright. The Delegates were dumb.

"It'll be easy when it's once started, and I know you'll like it," Judy went on; "we'll have the meeting this afternoon, for there's a lot to get ready, and we'll have refreshments too. Hooked, or unhooked, just as you say, though if you'll leave it to me I can get more of the unhooked kind."

"Don't be too sure," warned Gilbert.

"I'll ask Granny," Judy explained, "and when I tell her about the meeting I know she'll let me have what I want."

"Hooked grub is more fun," I said thoughtfully, "still there are so many of us it's hard sometimes to make it go round. If we turn improvers you may take my blessing and try your luck with Granny."

"I've thought of something else," Judy continued, growing bolder. "Suppose we dress up with our theatrical wardrobe and other things? The meeting will be in the schoolroom, and we'll each read what we've written special

for the occasion—then, when that part is over, it will be time for refreshments. Oh, do please say yes."

She clasped her hands and waited, though we didn't keep her long in suspense. Of course we said yes—we said it again and again, Gilbert shouting it out the loudest of us all, which was particularly nice of him because he hates doing things with pencil and paper, only—as you can see—there was more than just that to Judy's plan. There were to be surprises on every side. And such were always welcome to our all-embracing natures.

At three o'clock we entered the schoolroom and Judy had been there before us. But, for that matter, she'd been everywhere during those busy hours—upstairs, downstairs, trotting off to interview Granny, penetrating absolutely unterrified into Hannah's den, passing us again and again, sometimes with things hidden in her arms, and always with her face so screwed up with importance that we could hardly wait for afternoon to come. The moment the door was opened we saw that the secretings had not been for herself, as we'd supposed; she'd togged the old place out in honor of the meeting.

Strips of bunting hid the maps, and flags of the different nations dressed up the picture frames and fluttered gayly from the mantel-shelf. In the centre of the room five chairs were drawn up in an associable dummy-circle facing a round table covered with a white cloth, on which was fastened the subscription:

"WELCOME TO THE IMPROVERS."

The letters were made of cardboard, painted red, and looked bully, I can tell you. On the table were a glass of water, a vase of flowers, and a large hammer, while behind it was a big Sleepy-Hollow chair with the American flag festooned over its back and falling on either side in Roman togarry folds. Nor did the fixings end here. On one of the window sills was Hannah's very own canary in its gilt cage with a ribbon bow at each corner. We stared at it open-mouthed, and the fellow stared back at us with his little beady eyes; suddenly, he tilted up his head and burst into song, as if he'd been able to read the subscription and was doing it with all his might. That fetched us. We came out of our silence and gave a cheer for

Judy, who was hovering in the background kinder red, but very pleased looking.

"I'm glad you like it," she said, when there was room for her voice. "And now, Mr. President, please sit down and open the meeting."

Amid roars of delight from my companions —two—and four-legged—I stalked to the table and took my place, waving to the others to be seated. This was rather more difficult than it sounds, for the dogs thought they were invited to sit in the front row and there was a grand rush for the chairs. As soon as the rightful occupiers were victorious, I hammered loudly for the club to come to order.

"Friends and fellow country-men," I began, "the following distinguished persons are with us to-day: King Henery of Navarre, Mary, Queen of Scots, Sir Walter Raleigh, the Bride of Lammermoor, and an aged grandmother—name unknown——"

"I told you I was Lady Ronalds of Ronaldston," Margery put in sharply.

"Oh! I crave your pardon, Lady Ronalds," I cried with my politest air, "I'm sure your ladyship will forgive my infected memory—white hairs are always merciful to mistakes."

Margery's frowns scuttled away as if by magic, and she cast a grandmotherly smile upon boney Prince Charlie who sat in the presidential chair. Now, I flatter myself, I was pretty fine to look at. I had on a pair of Uncle Tom's plaid golf stockings, a kilt skirt of Judy's (worn over my trousers which didn't show), and a blousy white shirt with a red sash criss-crossed from the shoulder to the waist where it was tied in a big bow. I also wore a Glengarry cap, which Scotch folks call a bonnet, and a pair of gauntlet gloves, while dangling fiercely at my side was a large brass paper-cutter, dagger-shaped. I rapped thunderously again.

"It's usually the thing for ladies to lead," I remarked, "but from the signals of distress hoisted in my majestic sister's queenly orbs she would have it otherwise. Ah, Mary, Mary, quite contrary—there's nothing to be afraid of here."

Mary, alias Judy, shook her head so hard that her crown almost toppled off, and we had to wait till she made everything steady again. She was dressed in a long red gown which lay in billows on the floor, anchored there by

Liberty; an ermine cape—smelling dreadfully of mothaline (it had been dragged from the store-room, and I wondered at her!)—was around her shoulders, and also a mass of glittering chains (our own property) and strings of colored beads. She looked every inch a queen, all but her eyes—and they had a most begging expression.

"Well, well, Mary," I hastened to say graciously, "you do not sue in vain. Sir Walter Raleigh, that ever ready knight to oblige a lady —from mud-puddles up—will not be backward about coming forward now."

I was right. Sir Walter, otherwise Jack, was on his feet before I'd finished speaking, a bit crimson about the gills, but with a daring look all over his gallant figure. He wore his own black velvet suit with a lot of gorgeous chains upon his noble breast, a monstrous white ruff was around his throat, red ribbons were tied at his knees, ending in big rosettes, and on his feet were Turkish slippers with glistering turned-up toes. Nor was this all. Uncle Tom's choicest tobacco pouch hung at his side with one of the broad-swords hooked from the collection downstairs (and wouldn't he catch it if it were

caught on him!), while a blue cloak, belonging to Sheila, fell half-way down his back. He made a low bow to the skittish Queen (though he ought to have done it to me), drew a paper from his doublet and sailed right in:

"The rain is falling,
And children are bawling.
Oh! me, how shocking wrong that is!
For if we didn't have frequentious showers,
There wouldn't be any fruits and flowers;
They need the rain to wash their faces,
So they can smile up from the same old places.
I guess we'd all feel pretty mad
If there wasn't an apple, or peach, to be had.
So welcome the rain with shouts and be glad."

When Jack got through there was some pretty tall cheering, I can tell you, only if you think it was for the storm outside—you're way off. He knew fast enough what we meant, and grinned his hardest. He was still pretty red in the face and when he could make himself heard he asked the Bride of Lammermoor for her fan. At which, old Lady Ronalds shook her snowy head in an I-told-you-so way, and Queen Mary commanded him to take off his cloak, but he refused to obey the royal will,

though it would certainly have made him more comfortable. I banged the table loudly to put an end to the discussion. This time Mary wasn't to get off.

She got up slowly, tumbling Liberty off her skirts, and settled her crown as she looked around at us in the queerest fashion. Her words soon showed what the trouble was.

"Dear Mr. President, and dear visitors and members," she stammered, "I'm truly sorry that I couldn't write anything for this magnificent meeting, but somehow I didn't have time. I crave your gracious pardons."

Now, this was very fine, only it didn't go down with us. Of course she'd been busy—planning, and working to get things ready, and helping with our costumes—for she'd had her finger in every pie—but we supposed she'd 'tended to such a little thing as writing in the beginning, as we'd done. Our expressive glances expressed our feelings plainly.

"Oh, I'm so dreadfully sorry," she cried, "but please don't be mad. Just after dinner I thought of something—something——" she had to stop for a moment, then—with her eyes on the Occupier of the Chair—she went on:

"I thought of a little piece that I'd made up for dear father's birthday. You haven't heard it, so I brought it along. If you want me to, I'll read it now, though it wasn't written for the club."

I wish you could have heard the clatter that broke out among the members. I had to pound it back with might and main as I said, with the authority of a president: "We are content. Proceed, royal sister."

She unfolded the wad of paper that she was holding squnched up like a ball, and began to read in a voice that she tried hard to keep from being shaky (and couldn't!):

"To Father:

"When the bright dawn is breaking
O'er land and sea,
And all the world is waking,
My thoughts, with wings, are taking
Their way to thee.

"And when the sun is lying
Low in the west,
And birds are homewards flying,
My heart for one is sighing—
One I love best."

Queen Mary sat down and nobody clapped,

or said a word. We were still—very still—thinking! Jack and Sheila of their father, and we four of ours, and of darling mother, too. Suddenly they didn't seem so far away after all, but quite—quite near; for love is like a bridge that goes across any distance and then hearts can do the rest. The canary, as if wondering at the hush, put its head on one side and broke into the happiest little song, and in the midst of it old Lady Ronalds hobbled across the room and kissed Judy. Thereupon, Navarre patted the ermine cape consequentially, Sir Walter threw his cloak at her feet, and I let the flowers go helter-skelter into the royal lap, only saving the water from following after by the most wonderful presence of mind, while the Bride, who'd got back her fan, hung around raising a breeze—which wasn't unwelcome. It was a great innovation. The queen herself was quite red and smiling.

"So you like it," she said softly. "Oh! I'm very—very glad."

Then the hullabaloo broke out with a vengeance and it was long before I could restore quiet. When it was peaceful once more I nodded to Navarre to do his duty like a man. He

was the most splendiferous of us all. Stage jewels, top-boots, pistol, a velvet mantle (that smelled like Judy's ermine, and I shook in my shoes at the owdaciousness of the royal two, which Hannah would settle by and by!), and last—though far from least—a wonderful hat with a long white plume. He seemed in a hurry to begin, and stopped the shouts that greeted his appearance with a kingly frown. He held a large sheet of paper in his hand with a whacking big seal of red wax on its back—the royal seal—which was a clever thought on the boy's part.

"The poem I'm about to read to this august —no, I mean September—meeting," he said, clearing his throat, "is called 'To the Queen of Night.'" He repeated the title with gumption, and stopped long enough for it to sink deep into our listening souls, then he went on in a pompous voice:

"O Moon!
O Moon!!
O Moon-ation!!!"

Down he plumped in a great hurry, and we waited anxiously not knowing what to do.

Finally Lammermoor's bride nudged the kingly ribs with her elbow.

"Go on," she whispered.

"Go on?" he cried thunderously. "There's nothing to go on. That's the end——"

"The end!" shouted Sir Walter. "Well, of all the poetry! I call that the rottenest——"

Navarre was on his feet in a jiffy, his plume shaking like a giddy iceberg.

"Huh! you do, do you? What do you know about poetry?" he stormed. "You couldn't make up a word like 'Moonation' if you tried forever. It ain't in you. My piece is lots better than your measly Sunday-school——"

"Ah! hush," broke in the Scottish Queen, who loved peace, " please hush, boys, the meeting is so scrumptious—don't spoil it now. Really, Jack, 'Moonation' is a splendid portmanteau word. It is so meaningful! For, besides the moon, it makes you think of the nation there, and the country, too, which couldn't very well be put into a single piece of poetry, you know, and so Gilbert just jumbled them all together——"

"Oh! I catch on," said Sir Walter, "I see. Shake, my liege."

"We'll hurrah for 'Moonation,'" I ordered from the chair, "one, two, three—go!"

The cheers were given with a good will and Navarre, after wringing Raleigh's hand, sank into his place with a proud and satisfied countenance. Immediately the Bride, who was dressed in a long white gown with a mosquito netting veil over her face, and hanging far down behind, got to her feet. She carried a green leather hand-bag slung over one wrist, from which she took her paper and proceeded to read it through an old pair of Cousin Laura's stick-glasses, minus the glass. It was a short contribution—almost as short as Gilbert's, but different. It went like this:

"Mr. Josiah Binsse
Ate a sour quince—
And he's been lying here ever since."

When she sat down we didn't have to ask her to go on; we knew well enough she'd come to the end. But we weren't backward with our praises, and she sidled and bridled with delight.

Then it was Lady Ronalds' turn. The aged dame stood up with the support of a walking-stick, and without any of the bashfulness of

youth, such as Mary had shown, read the work of her pen in a high, squeaky voice:

"Granny's got a little Shadow,
Just as white ('ceptin' for brown spots on his ears),
as white can be,
Of course everybody knows that shadows are always
black—
But he's a different kind, you see."

She looked tickled to death when we clapped with all our might and the dogs, as if they knew she'd been singing of one of them, circled round her chair, barking, and jumping, and choking most dreadfully when she tried to shake off their kisses.

It was now left for the President to give his simple diffusion and all eyes were turned on him. If he wished that he'd opened the meeting, instead of waiting till the close, he kept that thought hidden deep in his valiant breast, and no one suspected it as he staggered to his feet and read, in an expressive manner, the following poem:

LINES TO MY CHILDHOOD'S NURSE.

"Good morning, fair Lizzie,
And how are your hands?
All ready to pull out my hair?
Your comb always sticks,
And your brush always pricks,
Till you nearly drive me to despair.

(Chorus!)

Lizzie, Lizzie, always so busy,
Always pulling so hard!
I sigh as I see you making the bed,
For I know soon I'll feel your
Claws at my head!"

I had to say the chorus again, and then the others caught on and yelled it over and over until they were hoarse. And my! how they praised me. Such shouts, such hand-clappings! I tell you what, a noise like that makes a fellow red and shiny on the outside, but with such a spreading, cosey feeling in his interior. It's worth a peck of trouble. Well, perhaps, the poetry *was* good. I rather liked it myself, and anyway, the whole thing was a true picture of nature (for we four hadn't forgotten old Lizzie by a long shot!), and that always makes the best kind of writing, everybody says.

"And now," I said when the hubbub had died down, "it has been whispered in my presidential ear that there are to be refreshments, though my presidential eye has looked in vain for them. But the noble queen, who's running this show, has crossed her heart that the rations are coming. The meeting is over. Mary, trot out the grub."

Mary got up in a majestical fashion and sailed across the room to the bell which she rang loudly. We waited, scarcely breathing at all, with funny little shivers of what's-going-to-happen-next running up and down our backbones. After a long minute there was the sound of heavy steps in the passageway without, the door was flung open and Duke—absolutely empty-handed—stood on the threshold. We glanced from him to Mary of Scotland and her face showed us she was as surprised as we—surpriseder! But—we couldn't help it—reproach, and something that began with A, filled our eyes.

Duke, with his most sober prayer-meeting expression, made us a bow.

"Mis' Ronaldses compliments ter de Improvers," he announced pompously, "en will

dey hab de agility ter descen' ter de dining room?"

For a minute certain articles of our costumes seemed awfully in the way, but to get rid of them would shake the very foundations of our attire. We knew not what to do. Then that great, good man, Duke, saw our trouble.

"Ef'n I was in yo' places I'd come erlong widout delay," he coaxed, "en I wudn't be on-easy in my min' 'count er any ole clo's. A gran'mudder's eye at a time like dis yer, ain' gwine ter see anyt'ing dat ain' fer de gennle peace en comfo'tubleness er de hull 'sembly. You kin take my word fer it. Don' you hol' back no longer; ez ole Marse Shakespeare says —wid abridgemints er my own, 'Stay not upon de notion er yo' comin', but come at oncet.'"

We did as he advised, and as we went the queen whispered to me that she'd supposed Sophy would bring lemonade and cake when she gave the signal, as had been arranged, and she wondered, she really did wonder——

But we had reached the dining room by this time and the reality stared us in the face. There was a blaze of light everywhere. In the centre

of the room, decked out in party toggery, stood the table holding a cold collection which was a number one, I can tell you, for the telephone is a regular Aladdin's lamp these days. Ice cream, wobbly jelly, dear little cakes, fruit, candy—and oh! joy—snapping-mottoes in profuseness. Duke managed the whole show with his superfinest company manner; if we'd been grown-ups he couldn't have transported himself more elegantly, and what's more, he remembered our elevated stations and never miscalled us once. Granny and Cousin Laura greeted us warmly on our descent. If they saw aught to displease them they gave no sign—they seemed full of admiration, and hunger, too, and kept Duke trotting pretty lively, filling their plates. Also they pulled mottoes with us, shrieking out at the snappers—just as girls always do. They even decked themselves up in the paper caps and sashes; Cousin Laura had three bonnets on her head, one on top of the other, but she looked so smiling and jolly that Queen Mary squeezed her hand and she squeezed Queen Mary's in return.

When the feast was over, I moved, as President, that we'd give three cheers for Granny.

But she stepped right out from her place and said that the only person deserving cheers was Queen Mary, and she hoped we'd give them from our hearts. Just as we were starting in, she held up her hand and cried in a ringing voice:

"Not three, but three times three—and a very big tiger!"

She actually led the shouting herself, only —and you may not believe this, though it's as true as true—she had to race for it with Cousin Laura. Duke waved a napkin and came in with his heavy base, while Sophy, who'd been assisting, trailed after, shrieking like a siren; the dogs, too, were not dumb. Thus all ended in joyousness and yet, though part of Judy's face was smiling, her eyes were kinder glisteny —but that's just like a girl!

## CHAPTER XIV

### "HANDKERCHIEF DAY"

ONCE, during the summer, Margery had called a certain day, which we seldom talked about, "Handkerchief Day," and she was promptly reduced to silence for daring to hint at such a thing. We fellows didn't have any trouble in seeing through her silly meaning, and we weren't going to stand that sort of nonsense if we could help it. Yet somehow, though we never used the oppressive term out loud, I guess the six of us said it over often in our hearts—especially as the direful time drew nigh, as they say in poetry. With Uncle Peter's arrival its shadowy breath chilled the very marrow in our veins, and our first wish was that he hadn't come quite so soon—I think even his own children must have wished the same, though of course they didn't mention it to us.

That was the only reason why we would have put off his coming, for as soon as we saw him,

Gilbert and I agreed with Jack that he was a father any fellow might be proud of, while Judy and Margery declared he was "a darling" in Sheila's very own tone of voice. He looked something like Uncle Tom, being almost as tall, though a bit wider, and he'd the same nice, put-you-at-your-ease eyes and pleasant laugh. His was an understanding nature, too, quicker really than Uncle Tom's—and not so teasable. He was with us from morning till night, preventing dulness everywhere, and he also talked a lot about what the others only vaguely hinted at, or mentioned with abating breath. For instance, he spoke of what we'd do at school without any brush-beating at all, or as if the subject ought to be kept hidden under a bushel.

The first time he began this kind of talk I saw Judy ball up her fists very tight, and on the moment I wanted to pitch into him for not holding his tongue; he might have told us fellows on the quiet, instead of going on, as he did, to paint pictures of the friends we'd make, and the fun we'd have out of lesson-hours. I rather wondered at him, and he so understanding! Of course Jack, and Gilbert, and I

couldn't help taking a manly interest in what he said, but the girls were different—particularly one of them. Still I wasn't quite so sure after a few minutes, for Judy, who was sitting next to him (we were all under the Council Tree), slipped her hand through the crook of his arm, and he patted it gently with his free hand. She wasn't uninterested at any rate, which was a good thing, because he'd started in on some of the capital times he'd had himself when he was a kid, and it would have been a shame if he'd stopped in the middle of an exciting scene—like the serial stories do.

"Then there'll be another splendid thing," he said after he'd finished his experiences, "and I fancy you boys will be the envy of your comrades. I'll give you three guesses that you don't know what I mean. Come, begin."

If you'll believe it, we couldn't tell what he was driving at, and yet we tried our best; the girls were quite as excited as we fellows, though they were bound to come wide of the mark—but not one of us even got "warm," so he had to out with it. Which he did, with a laugh.

"Letters."

Up to that moment we hadn't thought of anything of the sort, and the idea seemed prime. It's pretty jolly to get letters, to hold them in your hand a moment while you wonder a bit, and then to let the little inside voice out and hear it telling you things. Not so good ever as the real live voice, but awfully good in its way. Didn't we know? Hadn't we heard Father's and Mother's pen-voices using the words that their real ones had used again and again, so we could even hear their very tones in our hearts?

Uncle Peter laughed because we kept so still, but I saw him give Judy's hand a quick squeeze.

"Let me see," he went on, "Jack will have his regulars—Sheila, and a certain frivolous father, and he'll be peppered with other shot, Granny, not to mention Cousin Laura, who likes her Hoppity young man, and Judy here—well, I'm not going to tell you about Judy's letters, and Margery must drive her quill, or we'll use arguments. And what a budget you other boys will have. Letters from Manila, from Uplands, and Sheila won't forget you, and Uncle Peter will be a repeater. I say,

Judykins, besides your letter to Gilbert, wouldn't it be capital for you to write a journal-one to Phil, and send it every week? Just a little account of each day, if it's only Monday—blowy, Tuesday—snowy. While he, at his end, will do the same for you. Does that meet your ladyship's approval?"

"Yes, oh! yes," Judy answered in a queerish voice, sort of happy and miserable, with the happiness trying hardest to be on top.

"Hullo!" cried Uncle Peter, "Granny is waving. That means scamper to the house and the best man beats."

All the same, though we started fair and square, he brought up the rear with Judy—she hanging on his arm and laughing as they came up together. We others were pretty well blown and, what's more, Granny hadn't waved, though she said it was quite time that we gave Cousin Laura and herself some of our society.

The best thing about the letter plan was that we wouldn't be out of speaking-distance after all. And at Christmas we would be together at Uncle Peter's house in town—we boys, the girls, Granny, Cousin Laura and the two uncles. That would be pretty fine! It wasn't

such a dreadfully long time to Christmas anyway. And after it had passed, there would be the Easter holidays and then—before we knew it, grubbing early and late with scarcely any chance for fun, the summer vacation would be upon us, and we'd be back at Uplands again.

Uncle Peter talked about these things just as if he were one of us. Somehow, too, he'd heard of Handkerchief Day, though who'd let on, I can't imagine. But he didn't object in the least to the term, he said he thought it rather jolly himself; yet he is usually quick at catching your meaning, though I suppose even the quickest is dull at times—that's only man's nature. Still, I must say, I marvelled at him, and I knew Judy did, too, because the little pucker showed all of a sudden between her eyes.

"Why, Judykins," he laughed, seeing it there, "I verily believe you youngsters have all been thinking that Margery meant Handkerchief Day was just another name for Weeping Day. Perish the thought! That isn't like sunmaid Margery, who dimples and giggles if you so much as shake your finger at her. Take care, Goldilocks, remember how the bean came

by his black streak—there's no tailor near to sew you up if the same accident occurs. She meant that Handkerchief Day was Waving Day—clever Margery!—waving good luck, and good wishes, and good-by, which, you know, in the old times was 'God be with you.' And as long as that's its real meaning why should there be any tears? No, no, we'll only wave for one another to see, and keep our own pain hidden. I should be sorry, indeed, if hearts didn't ache, and eyes grow misty when we part from those we love. It's going to be hard for us all, though much harder for the little maids than for you, my bold adventurers, starting out to see the world—you needn't look so wise among yourselves. I know what I say. It always is hardest for those who stay behind. But keep up courage, all of you, wave your best, then go and have your cry out, and afterwards face things bravely. There'll be a beautiful rainbow in the sky—the bow of hope."

For a minute Uncle Peter's cheery voice was still and his face grave—graver than I'd ever seen it. I wondered what he was thinking of —then all of a sudden, he came back from his thoughts and looked around at us. And he

gave a chuckle—the softest, longest, kindest, roundest chuckle that lifted us right out of the dumps.

"Parson Peter has finished his sermon," he said, "but you won't forget his words in a hurry, will you? When Handkerchief Day comes and all the little white birds are set flying, there won't be any tears, I'm sure, to make those who go, or those who stay, unhappy, just brave hearts everywhere and sunny smiles. Do you know I shouldn't be surprised if you promised to try at least?"

"Oh! we do—we do——" interrupted Judy, as if she were spokesgirl for us all.

"You bet we do," we others chimed in, drowning her feeble voice, "you wait and see."

"Ah! I was certain of it," Uncle Peter cried with his pleasant laugh.

And well he might be. Yet even if he hadn't aired his views on the subject I'm positive none of us fellows would have made a scene; we'd have disported ourselves in a manful fashion, keeping those going-away feelings safely anchored under our coats. Of course we couldn't answer for the girls—that was too much to expect, one never can be sure of girls in any-

thing!—but at least he'd put them on their mettle, and they'd promised to make his words triable. I wondered a little, though, at his thinking they would have the hardest part of it. It seemed to me that *we* were the ones who'd suffer the most. What with lessons, new places, new faces, and the homesick feeling into the bargain, our lot wasn't the happy one he'd painted. But the longer I thought of what he'd said, the plainer I saw that it really was more *aching* to stay behind. Going off to school was like going out into the world; the strangeness was frightening, and yet, at the same time, it sort of beckoned you on and made you eager about it. I should have to grind a lot—that's what school means, of course—but there would be the other boys, and it wasn't as if I were to be alone from the start; Gilbert would be with me, and my very best friend and crony—Jack Ronalds.

Perhaps Uncle Peter was right after all. Granny would be lonely with us away, and Cousin Laura would miss us, too—she was getting different, somehow—and the girls would be in the very depths of dismalness without us —yes, it would come pretty rough on the girls

—on Judy most of all. She and I had always studied together, read the same books, played the same games, planned the same plans—and now, I was going off to the outside world to do things without her, and she had to stay behind. There wasn't the least use in pulling a long face over the matter, she couldn't go to a boys' school, though I'd be willing to wager anything she could beat all the chaps in my class put together—I have to cram my hardest to keep up with her. But it couldn't be, they didn't take her kind. . . . Yes, it would be no end lonely without old Judy—nobody could quite make up for her, and I knew that in her heart she said the same thing about me, though her outside voice didn't breathe a word of it—not once after Uncle Peter's talk. She went about smiling and singing all the time. She meant to have the stiffest upper lip of the crowd, as anyone could see, only I didn't intend to let a girl get ahead of me, even if she were my very own twin.

Then Handkerchief Day came. Such a bright morning with the jolliest little breeze stirring that sent down the gay colored leaves every now and then, and rippled through the

bushes, and made the dahlias and asters bob about as if they were dancing. Everywhere the air was full of gold and sparkle. I crept out of bed dolefully and hardly said a word to the other fellows, who were dressing very solemnly. Generally we'd skylark as we got into our clothes, pillows would have to be dodged, wet sponges likewise, but this day we'd no heart for such childish acts. We just plunged into the task before us as if we hadn't a moment to waste, and yet—though we spent no time in lighthearted sport—our fingers seemed all thumbs, and when at last we were ready we found, on going downstairs, that the others were all there—even to Cousin Laura. And everyone was so dreadfully polite! The girls, in particular, fairly tumbled over themselves in their efforts to wait on us, though there wasn't an earthly thing to do.

We trooped in to breakfast, grown-ups and all, and took our places at table. It seemed so foolish, somehow, to be sitting there. I don't know how the others felt, but I didn't want to touch a single mouthful—I think it would have choked me. Uncle Peter, however, set to work to eat a square meal, though he'd

plenty to say for himself, too, nor was Granny silent. And as for Cousin Laura—she was like a well of fun bubbling over all the while. I didn't hear a word she said, I only knew that she was laughing with the girls as if she were a mere kid. For my part I was quiet, though nobody noticed that, any more than that I left my food untasted. Duke was the only one who wasn't blind. Presently I heard him at my elbow, chirping like a grasshopper:

"I done tol' Cook ter sen' up an lil 'teeny kickshaw, same ez ole Marse Shakespeare says, en I sabe hit perticklar fer you. Des you pitch right in."

I shook my head politely. I didn't want kickshaws, or anything else; and off he went. He wasn't the man to call the attention of the whole table to my lack of appetite, but he was back again almost the next moment and his voice was full of persuasiveness, though it was smaller than the smallest print.

"You sutney will be wastin' erway befo' Phoebius is high in heben, ef'n you don' eat now," he whispered. "You'se gwine trabellin' fur en wide, en you'll sho'ly faint by de way ef'n you don' coal up. Des try dis yer

hypocrite, hit ain' got no nourishin' qualities ter speak of, hit's des got 'a goodly outside' ez Marse Shakespeare done observed, but hit's better 'n nuffin'. Des you try hit, suh."

I hadn't the heart to refuse him further, he seemed so full of concern. I took the hypocrite that he held toward me—a monster fellow—and made way with him in a jiffy. He was but 'a goodly outside' with naught within. Duke was back with another—bigger, browner, more satisfying—as the last mouthful slipped down. I treated the second even as I had the first, and a third soon went to keep the others company. I felt better then, and turned to solider things; Jack and Gilbert were doing their manful bests, following Uncle Peter's lead, so I tried to catch up. I also found my tongue; I couldn't very well sit dumb while the others were laughing and talking—I had to do my share.

After we left the table there was still some time to put in before the carriage would come around, so we went about bidding the servants good-by. We'd been wise enough to do this the night before, for fear at the last some might be overlooked, but that didn't prevent

our doing it all over again. And everywhere we received such heartfelt wishes, such honest handwringings. There was nothing put on by those simple, earnest souls—you could see they were downright sorry to have us go. I hadn't reckoned on Hannah, and when the hour of parting came—before I knew what she was up to—she swooped me right into her arms and kissed me. . . . Oh, well, she'd taken care of Mother and the uncles, so I suppose she felt she could do it for their sakes; she's oldish, too, and I couldn't exactly be mad, especially as it was over in a jiffy, and Jack, and Gilbert were served in the same fashion. Duke, who felt more deeply, I'm very sure, did but wring my hand in a mournful silence.

The stablemen were all grins and smirks, they seemed to think we were just going off to have fun; the seriousness of education meant nothing to their minds, and we didn't have the time to convince them otherwise, though perhaps it might have been unpolite. As we were parting, William poked something into my hand; of course I guessed right away what it was from the shape—he couldn't surprise me—but it was no end good of him to make me a

present. He called my attention in particular to some poetry on the outside of the parcel:

When this you spill,
Remember Bill.

He said Miss Judy had made it up for him—he couldn't think of the right words, but she'd written it off like chain-lightning, which showed what a wonder she was, though he'd really thought of the sense first, and he hoped I'd be true to his request. I assured him on my honor that I would, only I didn't need any "Meadow's Breath" to make me think of him. Which was true. Then he promised faithful to keep a father's eye on Liberty, and on the other dogs, and so I left him.

When the six of us turned to go back to the house Judy and I were side by side and somehow—without meaning to—we fell a little behind the others. We were very quiet and walking a bit slowly—and that's the time the thoughts come! Suddenly the grass got kinder woggily under my feet and I had to stand still—I couldn't take another step.

"Oh, Judy," I began.

She stopped, too, and turned her face toward me; he eyes were very shiny, and her mouth trembled a little at the corners.

"Oh, Phil," she breathed back, "Oh, Phil ——" then her voice broke. The next moment she straightened her shoulders and tossed her head. "See here, Philip Egerton," she cried in her snippiest manner, "I'll bet you my silver pencil I can beat you to the Council Tree."

"Huh! you think you can, do you?" I snorted. "Well, the only time you can do that, Smarty, is when I'm asleep, or lame. Toe up, now. Are you ready? Go-o!"

We started on the word and I tell you what, we flew. The other kids fell back in surprise as we streaked past, though—when they saw what our game was—they filled the air with shouts. The boisterous little breeze laughed, too, among the leaves, sending them down by twos and threes on our path, and the dogs came leaping after, not so much for the fun of racing, as for the fun of being with us. On and on we ran, across the lawn, and in and out of the happy sunlight—pretty even for the most part, but of course I touched goal first. I

couldn't be beaten by a girl—not even by Judy. She came up the next moment, with her face all shining and rosy; then we went back to the others, swinging hands and laughing—laughing, on my honor!

Danby was at the door as we reached the house and then the kissing began. Yes, I did it. Why not? Granny, dear Granny, of course, and Cousin Laura—not once, but severial times—and Sheila, and that dimpling Walking Delegate of a Margery—and old Judy. The other fellows and Uncle Peter were doing the same thing, and when that part of the programme was over the dear dogs had to be hugged and patted; then the next we knew we were in the carriage, the wheels had turned—and we were off.

Handkerchief Day indeed! Such a fluttering of white wings everywhere, for the family and the servants, as well, were waving their mightiest. It was a sight worth seeing, you can bet. The air was full of dancing shapes, and full, too, of jolly shouts: "Good luck." "Come again." "Write soon." "Good-by." "Be-careful-about-moving-trains." And we, in our turn, shrieked back, calling out a hun-

dred cautions—laughing and shouting with the best of them.

Just as we reached the bend of the road where you catch the last glimpse of the house we saw Judy step out from the others and run down into the drive, her hands to her mouth. Instantly Uncle Peter ordered Danby to stop, and down to us—very clearly—came her words:

"'God be with you.'" (You see she'd remembered what Uncle Peter had told us Good-by really means.)

He gave a quick start and his face grew very tender; then he stood right up in the carriage, with his hat held at his side.

"Sing with me," he said to us swiftly. Nothing more than that. But before we could wonder at his words he broke out into the old song, and the next second we joined in at the top of our lungs:

"'God be with you till we meet again,
By His counsels guide, uphold you,
With his own securely fold you—
God be with you till we meet again.'"

Danby flicked his whip and the horses sprang quickly forward, but above the sounds

of jingling metal and the hum of wheels the chorus floated back to us from the dear voices at Uplands:

"'Till we meet—till we meet—
God be with you till we meet again.'"

THE END

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
00019068894